

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
The Second Sunday after Trinity¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fourth Chapter of the Book of Judges.³

“And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud [**EE-huhd**] was dead. And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin [**DGAY-bin**] king of Canaan [**KAY-nunn**], that reigned in Hazor [**HAY-zawr**]; the captain of whose host was Sisera [**SISS-ur-uh**], which dwelt in Harosheth [**huh-ROW-sheth**] of the Gentiles. And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD: for he had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel.

“And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth [**LAP-pid-dahth**], she judged Israel at that time. And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah [**RAY-math**] and Bethel [**BETH-ull**] in mount Ephraim [**EE-frih-eem**]: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment. And she sent and called Barak [**BAY-rack**] the son of Abinoam [**uh-BIN-uh-umm**] out of Kedesh-naphtali [**KEY-desh NAFF-tuh-lie**], and said unto him, Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor [**TAY-bawr**], and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali [**NAFF-tuh-lie**] and of the children of Zebulun? And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon [**KYE-shan**] Sisera [**SISS-ur-uh**], the captain of Jabin’s [**DGAY-binz**] army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand. And Barak [**BAY-rack**] said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go. And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the LORD shall sell Sisera [**SISS-ur-uh**] into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak [**BAY-rack**] to Kedesh [**KEY-desh**].

“And Barak [**BAY-rack**] called Zebulun and Naph-tali [**NAFF-tuh-lie**] to Kedesh [**KEY-desh**]; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet: and Deborah went up with him. Now Heber [**HEE-burr**] the Kenite [**KEN-ight**], which was of the children of Hobab [**HOE-bab**] the father in law of Moses, had severed himself from the Kenites [**KEN-ights**], and pitched his tent unto the plain of Zaanaim [**ZAY-uh-NAN-im**], which is by Kedesh [**KEY-desh**]. And they shewed [**SHOWD**] Sisera [**SISS-ur-uh**] that Barak [**BAY-rack**] the son of Abinoam [**uh-BIN-uh-umm**] was gone up to mount Tabor [**TAY-bawr**]. And Sisera [**SISS-ur-uh**] gathered together all his chariots, even nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people that were with him, from Harosheth [**huh-ROW-sheth**] of the Gentiles unto the river of Kishon [**KYE-shan**]. And Deborah said unto Barak [**BAY-rack**], Up; for this is the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera [**SISS-ur-uh**] into thine hand: is not the LORD gone out before thee? So Barak [**BAY-rack**] went down from mount Tabor [**TAY-bawr**], and ten thousand men after him. And the LORD discomfited Sisera [**SISS-ur-uh**], and all his chariots, and all his host, with the edge of the sword before Barak [**BAY-rack**]; so that Sisera [**SISS-ur-uh**] lighted down off his chariot, and fled away on his feet. But Barak [**BAY-rack**] pursued after the chariots, and after the host, unto Harosheth [**huh-ROW-sheth**] of the Gentiles: and all the host of Sisera [**SISS-ur-uh**] fell upon the edge of the sword; and there was not a man left. Howbeit Sisera [**SISS-ur-uh**] fled away on his feet to the tent of Jael [**DGAY-ull**] the wife of Heber [**HEE-burr**] the Kenite [**KEN-ight**]: for there was peace between Jabin [**DGAY-bin**] the king of Hazor [**HAY-zawr**] and the house of Heber [**HEE-burr**] the Kenite [**KEN-ight**].

“And Jael [**DGAY-ull**] went out to meet Sisera [**SISS-ur-uh**], and said unto him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not. And when he had turned in unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle. And he said unto her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty. And she opened a bottle of milk, and gave him drink, and

¹ This sermon was originally written on the lessons for Morning Prayer on the First Sunday after Trinity, 2010, according to the American lectionary of 1943.

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

³ Judges 4:1-end (KJV).

⁴ Judges 5:1-end (KJV).

⁵ Job 3:1-end (KJV).

⁶ Romans 5:1-end (KJV).

⁷ Romans 5:11b-12 (RSV).

⁸ MASSEY H. SHEPHERD, JR., THE WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH 32 (Seabury Press 1952).

⁹ Deuteronomy 31:16-17a (RSV). *Cf.* Amos 3:3.

¹⁰ Micah 3:4 (RSV).

¹¹ Romans 5:12b (RSV).

¹² James 1:14-15 (RSV); *cf.* II Chronicles 12: 14.

¹³ James 1:14a (RSV).

¹⁴ Hebrews 1:1-2 (RSV).

¹⁵ Romans 16:26.

¹⁶ I Corinthians 15:3 (RSV).

¹⁷ Proverbs 30:5 (RSV); *cf.* St. Matthew 7: 24-25.

¹⁸ St. Luke 11:28 (RSV).

¹⁹ II Peter 2:1 (RSV).

²⁰ *Cf.* I Timothy 6:3-4.

²¹ II Timothy 1:13 (RSV).

²² Romans 5:11b (RSV).

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covered him. Again he said unto her, Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and inquire of thee, and say, Is there any man here? that thou shalt say, No. Then Jael [**DGAY-ull**] Heber's [**HEE-burz**] wife took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died. And, behold, as Barak [**BAY-rack**] pursued Sisera [**SISS-ur-uh**], Jael [**DGAY-ull**] came out to meet him, and said unto him, Come, and I will shew [**SHOW**] thee the man whom thou seekest. And when he came into her tent, behold, Sisera [**SISS-ur-uh**] lay dead, and the nail was in his temples. So God subdued on that day Jabin [**DGAY-bin**] the king of Canaan [**KAY-nunn**] before the children of Israel. And the hand of the children of Israel prospered, and prevailed against Jabin [**DGAY-bin**] the king of Canaan [**KAY-nunn**], until they had destroyed Jabin [**DGAY-bin**] king of Canaan [**KAY-nunn**].”

Or,

Here beginneth the fifth Chapter of the Book of Judges.⁴

“Then sang Deborah and Barak [**BAY-rack**] the son of Abinoam [**uh-BIN-uh-umm**] on that day, saying, Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves. Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes; I, even I, will sing unto the LORD; I will sing praise to the LORD God of Israel. LORD, when thou wentest out of Seir [**SEE-ir**], when thou marchedst out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water. The mountains melted from before the LORD, even that Sinai from before the LORD God of Israel. In the days of Shamgar [**SHAM-garr**] the son of Anath [**AY-nath**], in the days of Jael [**DGAY-ull**], the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through byways. The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased

in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel. They chose new gods; then was war in the gates: was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel? My heart is toward the governors of Israel, that offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless ye the LORD. Speak, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and walk by the way. They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the LORD, even the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of his villages in Israel: then shall the people of the LORD go down to the gates. Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak **[BAY-rack]**, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam **[uh-BIN-uh-umm]**. Then he made him that remaineth have dominion over the nobles among the people: the LORD made me have dominion over the mighty. Out of Ephraim **[EE-frih-em]** was there a root of them against Amalek **[AM-uh-leck]**; after thee, Benjamin, among thy people; out of Machir **[MAY-kirr]** came down governors, and out of Zebulun they that handle the pen of the writer. And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; even Issachar, and also Barak **[BAY-rack]**: he was sent on foot into the valley. For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart. Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks? For the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart. Gilead abode beyond Jordan: and why did Dan remain in ships? Asher continued on the sea shore, and abode in his breaches. Zebulun and Naphtali **[NAFF-tuh-lie]** were a people that jeopardized their lives unto the death in the high places of the field. The kings came and fought, then fought the kings of Canaan **[KAY-nunn]** in Taanach **[TAY-uh-nack]** by the waters of Megiddo **[mih-GIDD-oh]**; they took no gain of money. They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera **[SISS-ur-uh]**. The river of Kishon **[KYE-shan]** swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon **[KYE-shan]**. O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength. Then were the horsehoofs broken by the means of the pransings, the pran-

One of the primary functions the Church exists to fulfill is to be the custodian of God's legacy to mankind, preserving, expounding, teaching, and fostering the record of what God has revealed to us of His Will for us. Where else, after all, could that Will be found, other than in the Body He left behind to be His agent in this world? Thus as Our Lord Himself said, "'Blessed ... are those who hear the word of god and keep it!'"¹⁸

Conclusion:

This need to conform ourselves to the Church's teachings makes it especially important that, to preserve our sense of the individuality and the importance of Sin, we submit ourselves only to responsible, reliable authorities. Otherwise, as St. Peter wrote, "[F]alse prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction."¹⁹

Therefore, if we keep always before us that Sin is the misuse of our own personal Wills and, if persisted in, will separate us from God,²⁰ and if we follow the pattern of the sound words which we have heard from the Apostles, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus,²¹ then, with St. Paul, "[W]e also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation."²²

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The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister²³
June 6, 2010.

Remember, what St. James wrote is that “each person is tempted”,¹³ not that “our whole society is tempted”. Sin is personal, not collective. What is true of the active crimes of such vicious conspiracies is also true of the softer suggestions of over-consumption, greedy “carbon footprints” and similar inducements to feel guilt that we are constantly offered by political operatives and the skills for fashionable causes *de jour*.

C. The third thing we have to understand about Sin is that God’s Will for us, following which is the only means we have to avoid Sin, is to be found in the traditions He handed over to His Church.

It is precisely because Sin is always a personal act and therefore a personal responsibility that we must always be on our guard to avoid it. But we cannot possibly avoid it unless we are equipped to identify it and the principal means given to us for identifying it—that is, for discerning God’s Will for us—is in God’s Revelation to us.

The essence of that Revelation is summed up in the opening words of the Letter to the Hebrews: “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the world.”¹⁴

That Revelation, however, is almost exclusively to be found in the written and oral records of God’s dealings with and teachings of humanity, that is, in Scripture¹⁵ and in the other Tradition of the Church. “Tradition”, after all, means simply “that which has been handed over”. As St. Paul said, “I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received....”¹⁶ As the book of Proverbs says, “Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.”¹⁷

sings of their mighty ones. Curse ye Meroz [**MEE-rawz**], said the angel of the LORD, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty. Blessed above women shall Jael [**DGAY-ull**] the wife of Heber [**HEE-burr**] the Kenite [**KEN-ight**] be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent. He asked water, and she gave him milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish. She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workmen’s hammer; and with the hammer she smote Sisera [**SISS-ur-uh**], she smote off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples. At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down: at her feet he bowed, he fell: where he bowed, there he fell down dead. The mother of Sisera [**SISS-ur-uh**] looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariots? Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself, Have they not sped? have they not divided the prey; to every man a damsel or two; to Sisera [**SISS-ur-uh**] a prey of divers colours, a prey of divers colours of needlework, of divers colours of needlework on both sides, meet for the necks of them that take the spoil? So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years.”

Or,

Here beginneth the third Chapter of the Book of Job.⁵

“After this opened Job his mouth, and cursed his day. And Job spake, and said, Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived. Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it. Let darkness and the shadow of death stain it; let a cloud dwell upon it; let the blackness of the day terrify it. As for that night, let darkness seize upon it; let it not be joined unto the days of the

year, let it not come into the number of the months. Lo, let that night be solitary, let no joyful voice come therein. Let them curse it that curse the day, who are ready to raise up their mourning. Let the stars of the twilight thereof be dark; let it look for light, but have none; neither let it see the dawning of the day: Because it shut not up the doors of my mother's womb, nor hid sorrow from mine eyes. Why died I not from the womb? why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly? Why did the knees prevent me? or why the breasts that I should suck? For now should I have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept: then had I been at rest, With kings and counsellors of the earth, which built desolate places for themselves; Or with princes that had gold, who filled their houses with silver: Or as an hidden untimely birth I had not been; as infants which never saw light. There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and great are there; and the servant is free from his master. Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; Which long for death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures; Which rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they can find the grave? Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in? For my sighing cometh before I eat, and my roarings are poured out like the waters. For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me. I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; yet trouble came.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fifth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Romans.⁶

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and

no Will of its own; what appears to be its Will is in reality only the aggregate effect of the accumulation of the personal decisions and actions of all that group's members.

But if all Sin is the product of individual Wills, then, too, all Sin is, at bottom, the personal responsibility of the individuals who commit such Sins. However much sense it may make for the political historian to say that the Nazi Party in Germany committed great crimes against European minorities, to the moral theologian, such a statement is meaningless.

The National Socialist German Workers Party had no rational Will that could form, or be held responsible for, its acts. Morally, what it did was to provide a framework and support structure that, by saying certain behavior was required by some abstract “Volk” [FOLK] or people, facilitated thousands upon thousands of mortally sinful decisions by individual members of that Party. And it takes only a few shining examples of resistance to such evil collective suggestions, examples such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer or Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, to show that, no matter how much social and institutional approval is brought to bear in favor of oppression, injustice, and crime, the God-given human spirit is always capable of distinguishing good from evil and of refusing the proffered opportunities to Sin.

The same is true of the massively organized criminal enterprises and mass murders that marked the Soviet Communist regime, the Maoist gang that still strangles mainland China, or seemingly psychotic outbreaks such as the Pol Pot insanity in Cambodia and the intertribal genocide in Rwanda. Each individual who participated in those horrors bears personal responsibility before God for his or her personal decisions to assist or, on the contrary, to resist those immense evils.

but he will not answer them;
he will hide his face from them at that time,
because they have made their deeds evil.”¹⁰

When today’s Second Lesson tells us “all men sinned”,¹¹ it is telling us such Sin is an inescapable consequence of our being the creatures of a God who has given us both the power of rational thought and freedom of our Wills which direct that thought.

When someone makes the conscious, deliberate decision to take an action that is contrary to God’s Will, that decision is necessarily an *individual* act of the human Will. And, as G. K. Chesterton is said to have observed, we need only look around us to see that men and women frequently and enthusiastically exercise their God-given freedom of their wills to make decisions and to take actions that directly flout God’s directives to us. As St. James wrote, “[E]ach person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death.”¹²

Hence, Sin is an ever-present reality and the consequence of that reality, unchecked, is our loss of God’s favor and protection. That being so, if Calvin Coolidge’s pastor was conscientious in his duties, how could he have helped but raise with his congregation the difficult but urgent topic of Sin and how, having raised it, could he have taken any position other than to have been against it? His task, after all, was to reconcile his people to God, not to stand silently by and so let them keep severing themselves from God.

B. The second thing we have to understand is that all Sin is, at bottom, personal Sin, not collective or group Sin.

We have just seen that, at bottom, all Sin is the result of individual decisions and actions. A group, after all, has

rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement. Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin

abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “[W]e also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation. Therefore ... sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned....”⁷

In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction:

There is an anecdote about “Silent Cal” Coolidge, a native Vermonter and the famously taciturn 30th President of the United States. Supposedly one Sunday morning he went to their local Congregationalist Church while, for some reason, his vivacious wife, Grace, stayed home. When he returned, she asked him what the minister had preached on and Cal said just one word, “Sin.” So she asked him what the minister had to say about sin, to which Cal is said to have replied, “He was agin it.”

One point of the anecdote is, or at any rate used to be, that we naturally expect—or at least we used naturally to expect—that any preacher of the Gospel would be “agin” sin. So, from this perspective, Silent Cal was conveying to his wife no new information whatever. Further from that same perspective, we naturally expect—or at least we used naturally to expect—that any such preacher would spend a considerable portion of his pulpit ministry on the subject of sin, so, again, Cal was telling Grace nothing new or useful.

Theme:

We, however, no longer live in the same world that Calvin and Grace Coolidge did. People in general no longer revere the solid New England (and Western, and Southern) virtues of hard work, self-reliance, plain speaking, and personal economy that the Coolidges exemplified in their own lives. Politicians no longer work to lower taxes, reduce the public indebtedness, and shrink the size of the Federal government as Calvin did throughout his two terms as President.

And, especially, preachers no longer spend much time discussing the subject of Sin, unless it is the meaningless concept of “social sins” which are so formless and general that they invoke no personal responsibility whatever. To these preachers, all that is required are large subventions from the public fisc and then these “social sins” will vanish, apparently as the modern social-engineering rebirth of the Old Testament “sin offering”.

Development:

- A. The first thing we have to understand is that there is, indeed, such a thing as Sin and it is ever with us.**

“Sin is separation from God. It is the setting of our self-will in place of God’s Will.”⁸ This is the overall theme of today’s First Lesson, the story of Adam and Eve’s fall from innocence and from grace. That tendency in us has persisted ever since. As God told Moses, “[T]his people ... will forsake me and break my covenant which I have made with them. Then my anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide my face from them....”⁹ And as Micah wrote,

“Then they will cry to the LORD,