

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
The Twenty-First Sunday after Trinity¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fourteenth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel.³

“Then came certain of the elders of Israel unto me, and sat before me. And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be enquired of at all by them? Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith [SETH] the Lord GOD; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I the LORD will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols; That I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols.

“Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith [SETH] the Lord GOD; Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations. For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to enquire of him concerning me; I the LORD will answer him by myself: And I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I am the LORD. And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the LORD have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel. And they shall bear the punishment of their iniquity: the punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh unto him; That the house of Israel may go no more astray from me, neither be polluted any more with all their

transgressions; but that they may be my people, and I may be their God, saith **[SETH]** the Lord GOD.

“The word of the LORD came again to me, saying, Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it: Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith **[SETH]** the Lord GOD.

“If I cause noisome beasts to pass through the land, and they spoil it, so that it be desolate, that no man may pass through because of the beasts: Though these three men were in it, as I live, saith **[SETH]** the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters; they only shall be delivered, but the land shall be desolate.

“Or if I bring a sword upon that land, and say, Sword, go through the land; so that I cut off man and beast from it: Though these three men were in it, as I live, saith **[SETH]** the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they only shall be delivered themselves.

“Or if I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out my fury upon it in blood, to cut off from it man and beast: Though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live, saith **[SETH]** the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness. For thus saith **[SETH]** the Lord GOD; How much more when I send my four sore judgments upon Jerusalem, the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast, and the pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast?

“Yet, behold, therein shall be left a remnant that shall be brought forth, both sons and daughters: behold, they shall come forth unto you, and ye shall see their way and their doings: and ye shall be comforted concerning the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem, even concerning all that I have brought upon it. And they shall comfort you, when ye see their ways and their doings: and ye shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, saith **[SETH]** the Lord GOD.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fourteenth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke.⁴

“And it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath day, that they watched him. And, behold, there was a certain man before him which had the dropsy. And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day? And they held their peace. And he took him, and healed him, and let him go; And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straight-way pull him out on the sabbath day? And they could not answer him again to these things.

“And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them, When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

“Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.

“And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God. Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at

supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and shewed [SHOWD] his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “[A]t the time of the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come; for all is now ready.’ But they all alike began to make excuses.”⁵

Homily:

Today’s Second Lesson points to the need for our working with God, responding to His calling in our lives in order to experience the great joy we can have in His presence. In this Lesson, we read again about the great man who held a banquet. The very rich man spent a great deal of time, effort, and treasure to prepare an enormous feast. We don’t know the purpose of the banquet or the reason for giving the invitations. In fact, the lack of reason, such as a wedding or birthday celebration, is even more like God our Father because the banquet invitation is given as a blessing to anyone who will come.

giveness. And He is so gracious and merciful that He will forgive us.

But if we don’t ask for forgiveness, then we are wandering away, pulling ourselves out of fellowship with Him into the world. But, the Bible says, if our heart does not condemn us, if we have confessed our sins and know we are forgiven, then we can go to God with confidence and ask Him whatever we need. And we will receive from Him because we are obedient to Him and remaining in Him and allowing Him to remain in us. Isn’t that amazingly Good News?

Our God is a great God full of forgiveness and love. He is inviting us to come to His feast not just now, but now at His Table and then throughout each day to remain in Him and Him in you.

Let us not be full of excuses. Let us come to Him with Joy and enjoy His feast with thanksgiving and invite others to come and enjoy the banquet with us as well. In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

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The Rev’d Jeffrey Scott Johnson⁸
June 9, 2013

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Second Sunday after Trinity, 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 44 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxix (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxviii (CIPBC 1963).

³ Ezekiel 14:1-end (KJV).

⁴ St. Luke 14:1-24 (KJV).

⁵ St. Luke 14:17-18a (RSV).

⁶ I John 3:24.

⁷ Acts 4:12.

Jesus shows them how wrong they are. He told this parable while having dinner in the house of one of the chief Pharisees. This would be like having dinner with the Senate Majority leader, someone at the pinnacle of power. Jesus is telling this story and several other parables right before it to a self-righteous man who thinks he is really in great shape with God. The chief Pharisee thinks because he is rich and has become a leader of the very strict sect of legalistic Jews, he must be really special.

We need to be so careful ourselves not to let the world, the things of the world, and the lust of the flesh become the focus of our attention and so distract us from hearing the invitation of Our Lord as He says “*come to me*; come spend time with me; come spend time in my Word, come spend time in prayer; come be in fellowship with Me and with My Body of Believers.”

When we come to our Lord’s Table, He offers Himself to us, His real Body and Blood in the Bread and Wine. We are partakers of the Divine Bread of Heaven and True God comes into us to abide in us. Saint John⁶ very clearly tells us that when we are obedient to Jesus, to what He taught—to loving God and loving our neighbor not in just words but in our actions—then Jesus and the Holy Spirit abide in us. They remain in us.

We find salvation in Christ alone. It is this truth that C. S. Lewis emphasizes at the end of *The Silver Chair* when Jill suggests to Aslan that she must quench her thirst from another stream. The lion responds, “There is no other stream”.⁷

But if we are being disobedient, then the Holy Spirit will speak to our heart and tell us. He will give us that uncomfortable feeling that something is not right. The Holy Spirit will speak to our hearts. The Bible says if our hearts are telling us something is wrong, then we need to come to God and ask for-

There are no strings attached, there are no prerequisites, and no expense on the part of those being invited. The servant is sent out to invite all with the words, “Come all things are now ready.” These words suggest that word had gone out before that a banquet was being made ready and soon an invitation will come, for now the servant is saying, “Come, it’s ready now, come and enjoy the blessing of food, drink and fellowship.” And then what happens? The people invited start to make all kinds of excuses.

The first excuse is, “I just bought some new property and I need to go see it.” Have you ever heard of someone buying a piece of property without first going and looking at it, examining it, bargaining for the price? What an absurd excuse. I don’t want to come for food and fellowship because I need to go look at land. Why? The land isn’t going anywhere. It will be there after the banquet. The real reason is the person doesn’t want to spend time with the man who put on the banquet or with his neighbors who may be coming as well. The man is more interested in his own world.

The second excuse is “I need to go test my new oxen out.” This is lame as well. I’ve just bought some oxen but I don’t know if they are any good. Who would do that? Can you imagine buying a car without test driving it or having some assurance that the car will perform like it is supposed to? While on the surface testing oxen to see if they are going to be any good with plows and working the land sounds OK, but, this is really an excuse of caring more about the things of the world than about people.

The third excuse is “I’ve just married a new wife and therefore I cannot come”. This excuse is rife with questions. If he had just been married, then he would have had a week-long celebration and the honeymoon party. He must be past this occasion or he wouldn’t even be asked by the servant. And most newlyweds are so poor that a dinner invitation is usually a great

thing to get: free food! Jesus used this excuse in the parable to be symbolic of caring more about the lust of the flesh than about the things of God and spending time with Him.

Three excuses representing the excuses of why people do not come to God. The banquet is symbolic of God's inviting everyone to come to be with Him to have fellowship with God Himself through the banquet of the Lord's Supper. We are invited to the greatest banquet of all, to dine on the very Body and Blood of the Lamb of God—Jesus Christ. And by doing so to have forgiveness of our sins, to have the filth of sin removed so we can boldly enter into the very presence of God and His pure holiness. He comes into us to dwell with us and inside us, to transform our character in to the very character of Jesus, to put divinity into our human flesh. What an amazing banquet we are invited to—everyone is invited to. But, so many, in fact most people do not come to the Table.

Why don't people come to God, to His feast? The first excuse is the land which is symbolic for the world itself. We are in a fallen world, yet the fallen world has many things to attract us, to lure us away from our Creator. There are those even who would rather focus on praising "Mother Earth" or trees, or the beauty of nature instead of praising the Creator of all that is Created. This is an age-old problem of people worshipping the creation instead of the Creator. Our Creator God is so much greater than earth or the sun and moon and all the planets and all the galaxies. God is endless. He is infinite and outside of the boundaries of time and space. He created time and space. Our God is absolutely awesome. Yet people would rather go to the beach and worship the sun and surf than to sing praises to our God Creator and come to His Table of Thanksgiving.

The second reason for not coming to God is a love for the things in the world; the gadgets, toys, cars, boats, horses, but even more, the money from businesses, all the things money can buy; the oxen are symbolic of all the things in the world that

distract us from wanting to have fellowship with God. And we can make all kinds of logical reasons why the things we'd rather be doing or with have a real purpose in our lives. The oxen are important tools for farming but they were just an excuse. There are many things and activities in our lives we can get caught up into cherishing more than coming to the Banquet of our Lord. And not just to coming to His Banquet to church and worship, but also to spending time in His Word, the Bible in study or meditation, or in prayer, in being focused on God and feeling His presence in everything we do. God wants our fellowship with Him to start with His Table and inviting His presence into you, but He also wants to remain in you and you in Him all day every day. (More on this in just a minute.)

And the third excuse, the new wife, is symbolic of the lust of the flesh. This is often thought of as the big distraction, that people would rather follow the lust of the flesh than follow God. Yes, the flesh and lust is an enormous lure away from God but as we've seen it is only one of three used in this parable. We need to not think that if we don't have this problem we're OK. We need to be careful to avoid being drawn into the lust of the flesh and out of obedience to God. And at the same time recognize this is just one of many distractions that may keep us from answering the invitation to fellowship with God.

God is calling each of us to come to His banquet. In the parable, when the rich, well-off, so-called righteous leaders of society did not come to the banquet, the rich man sent his servants out to invite the poor, the maimed, the crippled and blind. Each of these categories of people—poor, maimed, crippled, and blind—were looked down upon in Jewish society as being cursed by God. They were less than "whole" persons, so somehow God's wrath must be on them for their lack of righteousness; somehow they deserved to be in that state because they didn't measure up; their performance and their righteousness was lacking so they go zapped by God.