

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER
The Second Sunday after Easter¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the thirty-second Chapter of the Second Book of Moses, called Exodus.³

“And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the LORD. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves: They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation. And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast

brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever. And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.

“And Moses turned, and went down from the mount, and the two tables of the testimony were in his hand: the tables were written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables. And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Moses, There is a noise of war in the camp. And he said, It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome: but the noise of them that sing do I hear.

“And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses’ anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount. And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and strawed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it. And Moses said unto Aaron, What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them? And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest the people, that they are set on mischief. For they said unto me, Make us gods, which shall go before us: for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf.

“And when Moses saw that the people were naked; (for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies:) Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the LORD’s side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith [SETH] the LORD God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men. For Moses had said, Consecrate yourselves today to the LORD, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother; that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day.

“And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the LORD; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin. And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written. And the LORD said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book. Therefore now go, lead the people unto the place of which I have spoken unto thee: behold, mine Angel shall go before thee: nevertheless in the day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them. And the LORD plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made.”

Or,

Here beginneth the seventh Verse of the thirty-third Chapter of the Second Book of Moses, called Exodus.⁴

“... And Moses took the tabernacle, and pitched it without the camp, afar off from the camp, and called it the Tabernacle of the congregation. And it came to pass, that

every one which sought the LORD went out unto the tabernacle of the congregation, which was without the camp. And it came to pass, when Moses went out unto the tabernacle, that all the people rose up, and stood every man at his tent door, and looked after Moses, until he was gone into the tabernacle. And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the LORD talked with Moses. And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at the tabernacle door: and all the people rose up and worshipped, every man in his tent door. And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. And he turned again into the camp: but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle.

“And Moses said unto the LORD, See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight. Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew **[SHOW]** me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people. And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. And he said unto him, If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? is it not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth. And the LORD said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name. And he said, I beseech thee, shew **[SHOW]** me thy glory. And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew **[SHOW]** mercy on whom I will shew **[SHOW]** mercy. And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. And the LORD said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: And it shall come to pass,

⁷ I Peter 2:11.

⁸ I Peter 2:13-17.

⁹ Ephesians 2:6.

¹⁰ II Peter 3:8.

¹¹ Habakkuk 2:20.

¹² I Corinthians 15:25-26.

¹³ Rector, St. Matthew's Anglican Catholic Church, Newport Beach, CA.

constantly reminded, “The Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before him”.¹¹

Conclusion:

As we habitually enter into God’s presence through prayer, we learn to experience God’s joy and peace. We learn that God is concerned for the world, but He is not worried about it. He is slowly but surely accomplishing His purposes as we move toward the final victory over death.¹² Through prayer, we discover that it is not God’s will for us to be anxious, fearful and angry. We learn that God wants us to faithfully pray for God’s will to be done in the world, to do the good that He calls each of us to do, and trust Him for the results that He will accomplish in his good time. For,

“Our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”

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The Rev’d Canon Stephen C. Scarlett¹³
November 11, 2012

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Epistle for Holy Communion on the Twenty-Third 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 36 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxix (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxvii (CIPBC 1963).

³ Exodus 32:1-end (KJV).

⁴ Exodus 33:7-end (KJV).

⁵ Isaiah 56:1-8 (KJV).

⁶ Philippians 3:7-end (KJV).

while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.”

Or,

Here beginneth the fifty-sixth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.⁵

“Thus saith [SETH] the LORD, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed. Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil.

“Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree. For thus saith [SETH] the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off. Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people. The Lord GOD, which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith [SETH], Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the seventh Verse of the third Chapter of the First Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Philippians.⁶

“... But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing. Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.) For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”

we learn to live in the present moment in the light of the eternal victory.

When we focus on the temporal, we get caught up in the false urgencies and emergencies of the kingdom of man and we get anxious, fearful and angry. Conversely, when we lift up our hearts to the Lord, when we continually ascend into heaven and take our place among the elect of God, when we take all of life and offer it to God in Christ, things change. Then we become new people. We look at life in a new way; and, strangely, we are able to have a greater impact in the world. Prayer gives us new power because it aligns our desires and goals with the will and purposes of God.

One thing we learn through prayer is that God’s time horizon is different than ours. God is not in a hurry. Our crises are not his crises; our deadlines are not his deadlines. With the Lord, a thousand years is as a day and a day is as a thousand years.¹⁰ He is doing what He is doing, and He always accomplishes his will. Prayer gets us on board with him—it does not work the other way.

Think of it this way. The Church gathers around the altar on the Lord’s Day, as the outpost on earth of the kingdom of God, to exercise its priestly and kingly vocation. It has continued to do this for two thousand years through the rise and fall of various editions of the city of man; through the fall of Jerusalem and the Roman Empire; through periods of intense persecution and relative peace; through the dark ages and times of human flourishing; through the emergence and overthrow of various enemies of God. Through all of this, Jesus has remained Lord of the creation. Through all of this, the Church has reigned with Him through prayer, enduring faithfully through persecution, offering praise and thanksgiving for God’s blessings and praying for justice and the needs of the world. And through all of this the Church is

appearance that Christian faith has failed because it did not produce some desired temporal result.

Christian renewal requires that the Christian hope—the coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come—be restored as the goal; and it requires that we begin to look at life in this world in terms of how it serves the goal of eternal life. As C. S. Lewis wrote, “Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you get neither.”

3. The Kingdom of God and prayer.

Living life now in light of eternity requires a serious commitment to the life of prayer. This is not just a commitment to pray for things. It is a commitment to live out the reality of our status as heavenly citizens. Ephesians tells us that God “raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus”.⁹ In Christ, we are restored to our vocation as kings and priests, and we exercise this vocation through prayer. Through prayer, we offer the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving; and through prayer, we reign with Christ over the world.

The practice of prayer has suffered greatly from the focus on time instead of eternity. People are always praying for short term, practical benefits rather than eternal salvation, progress in virtue and the larger purposes of the kingdom. Consequently, there are many small, temporal miracles, but little evident holiness and power in the Church.

People don’t commit themselves to the life of prayer because it seems to have no practical impact; it gets in the way of “doing” things. This is precisely the problem. When eternity becomes the servant of time, the framework of prayer is turned upside down. Christian prayer is not the way to get things done in time. Christian prayer is the way that time is continually lifted up into eternity; it is the way

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “Our citizenship is in heaven, from whence we eagerly wait for the Savior.” In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

In today’s Second Lesson, St. Paul says, “Our citizenship is in heaven, from whence we eagerly wait for the Savior.” This statement contains a couple of digs at the politics of the day. Philippi was a military colony, full of retired and proud Roman soldiers. There would have been an air of Roman patriotism in the city. St. Paul’s emphasis on our heavenly citizenship is a caution against having too great an enthusiasm for the current order. Caesar was given the title, “Savior of the World” for the relative peace he brought to the Roman Empire. When St. Paul says that we look for the Savior to come, he is reminding his hearers of the limits of military and political salvation.

While St. Paul was confronting Roman patriotism, Jesus was speaking in Israel to an audience more hostile to Caesar. Those who came to test him meant to create a dilemma. If Jesus said it was okay to pay taxes, he would be seen as legitimizing the despised Roman rule. If he said it was not okay to pay taxes to Rome, he would risk arrest as a political agitator. His answer put things in perspective. The coin bore Caesar’s image and likeness, and therefore might rightly be rendered to Caesar. But since the whole human person bears the image and likeness of God, we should give ourselves in worship and service only to God. Thus, when Caesar demanded worship of the early Christians, they refused and chose martyrdom instead.

1. The meaning and implications of heavenly citizenship.

When St. Paul spoke of heavenly citizenship, he wasn't merely offering a spiritualized dissent to Roman rule or speaking of a future existence in something called heaven. He was speaking of an actual kingdom that exists right now. The kingdom of God is ruled over by Jesus, the Lord and Savior of the world. He was crowned as king in the Ascension after he conquered sin and death on the cross. We became citizens of that kingdom in baptism. We have actual responsibilities, as citizens, to obey the king, worship God and work and pray and give for the spread of the kingdom as we wait for Jesus to come.

Moreover, our heavenly citizenship is not secondary or added on top of our connections to this world. We do not hold a dual citizenship in the kingdom of God and the city of man. Rather, the Bible describes us as "strangers and pilgrims," resident aliens in the world.⁷ To be sure, the Bible exhorts heavenly citizens to be exemplary resident aliens in the city of man. For example, St. Peter writes,

"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king."⁸

We are called to submission and obedience to secular authority because we are ambassadors for the kingdom of God. We are to represent our homeland well as a matter of foreign policy.

2. The difficulty and opportunity for Christians in America.

There are two particular challenges for us as we attempt to adopt and live out this Biblical framework. First, America has historically been a friendly place for Christians. It's hard to act as strangers and pilgrims when one feels very much at home. Second, this sense of being at home is slowly declining. Many Christians feel a sense of *angst* and, even, anger as they try to figure out how to get back to where we once were.

One thing seems obvious. America is not going back to where it was for the simple reason that Americans are less profoundly Christian than they once were. Some three-quarters of us still identify ourselves as Christians. But this shared faith is highly diluted and individualized. The former national consensus about the moral order of universe has given way to a general sense that all should be free to do as they please as long as no apparent harm is done. Deists and Baptists of the colonial era had more in common than do many Christians today.

There is opportunity in this change of circumstances to more fully embrace the Biblical model. It is increasingly evident that we are, indeed, like Abraham, strangers and pilgrims, resident aliens in this world. The church has a greater opportunity to fulfill its vocation when it is not at home in the world and, thus, sets its sights more clearly on the world to come. This is precisely what St. Paul is saying. We are not citizens of earth looking for Caesar to save us. We are citizens of the heavenly city, eagerly waiting for our king to come.

When vibrant and committed Christian faith declines, eternal goals are replaced with temporal ones. Thus, for the last generation cutting edge Christianity has been eager to show how the kingdom of God can have a positive, practical impact on this world. The result has been, largely, that Christian faith has no impact at all; or, it has resulted in the