

**SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER**

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Priest Associate

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fourth Chapter of the Fifth Book of Moses, called Deuteronomy.²

“Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you. Your eyes have seen what the LORD did because of Baalpeor **[BAY-ull-PEA-orr]**: for all the men that followed Baalpeor **[BAY-ull-PEA-orr]**, the LORD thy God hath destroyed them from among you. But ye that did cleave unto the LORD your God are alive every one of you this day. Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons’ sons; Specially the day that thou stoodest before the LORD thy God in Horeb **[HOE-rebb]**, when the LORD said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children. And ye

came near and stood under the mountain; and the mountain burned with fire unto the midst of heaven, with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness. And the LORD spake unto you out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice. And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone.

“And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go over to possess it. Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the LORD spake unto you in Horeb [**HOE-rebb**] out of the midst of the fire: Lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female, The likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air, The likeness of any thing that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth: And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the LORD thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven. But the LORD hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day. Furthermore the LORD was angry with me for your sakes, and sware that I should not go over Jordan, and that I should not go in unto that good land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance: But I must die in this land, I must not go over Jordan: but ye shall go over, and possess that good land. Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which he made with you, and make you a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, which the LORD thy God hath forbidden thee. For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.”

Or,

Here beginneth the sixtieth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.³

“Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee. The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah [**EE-fuh**]; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD. All the flocks of Kedar [**KEY-durr**] shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth [**nih-BYE-ahth**] shall minister unto thee: they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory. Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows? Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish [**TARR-shish**] first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the LORD thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because he hath glorified thee. And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee: for in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy on thee. Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted. The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious. The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee; The city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel. Whereas thou has been forsaken and hated, so that no man went through thee, I will make thee an eternal excellency,

a joy of many generations. Thou shalt also suck the milk of the Gentiles, and shalt suck the breast of kings: and thou shalt know that I the LORD am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob. For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron: I will also make thy officers peace, and thine exactors righteousness. Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise. The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the LORD shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the LORD shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended. Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified. A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the LORD will hasten it in his time.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the nineteenth Verse of the sixteenth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Luke.⁴

“There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tor-

But Dives [DEE-vaze] has one thing right. He recognizes that it is not too late for his brothers. And it is not too late for us. There is still time to change our ways and bridge those chasms before we die and the boundaries we have erected become permanent and God says to us, “Thy will be done.”

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St. David’s Anglican Catholic Church
Charlottesville, Virginia

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

² Deuteronomy 4:1-21 (KJV).

³ Isaiah 60:1-end (KJV).

⁴ St. Luke 16:19-end (KJV).

⁵ St. Luke 16:26 (RSV).

saved. He doesn't care about the nation of Israel. He certainly doesn't care about the Gentile world. He still does not see what is plainly before him, namely, that it is this very willingness, to restrict the range of people with whom he is willing to be involved, that has cut him off from God in the first place.

Dives [**DEE-vaze**] placed himself at the center of his own little universe and admitted only those who he thought could contribute to his enjoyment of life in this world. He is in torment precisely because in so doing he has cut himself off from the company of the God who has a special concern for the poor.

Now I ask you, don't we do the same thing? Don't we set boundaries when we engage in selective evangelism? We are not going to talk to this person about Jesus because we don't think he is the kind of person we want in our church. We are not going to share the Gospel with a certain other person because he is Jewish or Muslim and might be offended. We set boundaries by choosing whom we will invite and whom we will not.

We don't want to be friends with people who are obnoxious. We don't want to be friends with people whose customs are different and hard to understand. We certainly don't want to be friends with people who wish us harm, even though the Gospel tells us to love our enemies. And we don't want to be friends with people who challenge our opinions or who might make demands on us. That includes God, by the way, because God is always challenging our opinions and making demands on us. We seem to realize that a closer relationship with God would require extensive changes in the way we live.

Conclusion:

So we build fences. We dig chasms, we establish boundaries. And God allows us to do that. The problem is that these boundaries work both ways, and by fortifying them we exclude ourselves from the Kingdom of God.

mented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith [**SETH**] unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: "And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us."⁵ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

What kind of chasm separates souls in torment from souls in blessed rest and comfort? The Gospel says it is a great chasm. Yet it is not so great that people cannot see each other and converse across it. Like all barriers, this chasm keeps people in as well as keeping people out. It separates people who are close to each other in every respect except one. They are not able to reach out to each other or share resources with each other.

The interesting thing about this great chasm is that it is man-made. The rich man himself created the barrier that separates him from the beggar. He created it in this world.

In the story, the beggar is given the name "Lazarus", which means "Helped by God". The rich man is not dignified with a

name in the story, but he is traditionally called “Dives” [DEE-vaze], which is Latin for “rich”.

In life, Dives [DEE-vaze] and Lazarus knew each other and lived near each other. Lazarus used to sit at the gate of the rich man’s property and scavenge the garbage for scraps of food. Dives [DEE-vaze] knew him by name, but never invited him in for a proper meal or anything else. These men were simply not of the same economic class or social status and could not be expected to associate with each other, much less share the wealth of the world.

So even though Dives [DEE-vaze] and Lazarus lived near each other physically, they were separated by an invisible chasm. They could see each other and talk to each other but could not interact with each other. And the chasm that separated them in this world is the same one that separates them in the next world.

In the latter case, of course, it is Lazarus who had the resources that Dives [DEE-vaze] wants to share. This is one of the famous Gospel reversals that we read about in the New Testament. Such reversals appear in the Old Testament as well and also in many of the rabbinical writings, but we are familiar with them in such passages as: “The first shall be last and the last shall be first”, “The meek shall inherit the earth”, “Tax collectors and prostitutes go into the Kingdom of God before you”, and the oft-repeated phrase from the *Magnificat*, “He has put down the mighty from their seat and has exalted the humble and meek.”

God is always on the side of the poor and the weak, and whoever separates himself from them, separates himself from God. That is one lesson that Dives [DEE-vaze] learned when it was too late to do anything about it.

The other lesson that Dives [DEE-vaze] learned is that, in the world to come, the choices we have made in this life are ratified, confirmed, and made permanent. As C. S. Lewis says, the ultimate words of judgment that God pronounces are these, “They will be done.” So when Dives [DEE-vaze] calls out for Abraham

to send Lazarus on an errand of mercy, Abraham replies in the words of the text: “[B]etween us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.”

It is one of the great ironies of the gospel that the Kingdom of God has boundaries. God has no boundaries, and His kingdom should not have any either. But when He decided to create human beings, God made a bold and risky decision. He decided to endow us with free will. He wanted us to love Him freely as He loves us and not be compelled by some kind of inherent programming that would leave us no choice. It is His desire that all creatures should be included in His kingdom of fellowship and peace, but He left us with the option to exclude ourselves if we so choose.

There are certain behaviors and certain attitudes that are excluded from the Kingdom of God. The Bible contains a number of lists of such attitudes and behaviors, and by listing them God indicates His desire to purge us of them and to make us fit to live in His kingdom. But when people insist on holding onto those attitudes and behaviors, which we call sins, God honors those choices.

So here we have a man who built a wall around himself and a few friends whom he considered to be his equals. He refused to consider himself to be part of a larger community that might include people like Lazarus. So he isolated himself from the poor man, and in the process isolated himself from God. The result was that the chasm that he himself erected became permanent.

But even when he realized what had happened, Dives [DEE-vaze] still refused to expand the circle of people he cared about. “I beg you, father,” he says, “to send him [that is Lazarus, whom he considers to be some kind of servant] to my father’s house. For I have five brothers, that he may warn them lest they also come to this place of torment.”

Now isn’t that wonderful? The man is concerned about his family. Everybody else can go to Hell, just so his brothers are