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St. David's Anglican Catholic Church  
Charlottesville, Virginia

March 17, 2013

**SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER**  
**The Second Sunday in Lent<sup>1</sup>**

**The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Rector**

**Lessons:<sup>2</sup>**

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the twenty-seventh Chapter of the First Book of Moses, called Genesis.<sup>3</sup>

“And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his eldest son, and said unto him, My son: and he said unto him, Behold, here am I. And he said, Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death: Now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me some venison; And make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die. And Rebekah heard when Isaac spake to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt for venison, and to bring it.

“And Rebekah spake unto Jacob her son, saying, Behold, I heard thy father speak unto Esau thy brother, saying, Bring me venison, and make me savoury meat, that I may eat, and bless thee before the LORD before my death. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command thee. Go now to the flock, and fetch me from thence two good kids of the goats; and I will make them savoury meat for thy father, such as he loveth: And thou shalt bring it to thy father, that he may eat, and that he may bless thee before his death. And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man: My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver; and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing. And his mother said unto him, Upon me be thy curse, my son: only obey my voice, and go fetch me them. And he went, and fetched, and brought them to his mother: and his mother made savoury meat, such as his father loved. And Rebekah took goodly raiment of

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<sup>1</sup> This sermon was originally written on the Epistle for Holy Communion on the Fifth Sunday in Lent, commonly called Passion Sunday, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> *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 35 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxvii (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxv (CIPBC 1963).

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 27:1-40 (KJV).

<sup>4</sup> *Ecclesiasticus* 4:11-28 (KJV).

<sup>5</sup> Hebrews 9:11-end (KJV).

<sup>6</sup> This is the reason that, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, the priest and the Levite “passed by on the other side”.

her eldest son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them upon Jacob her younger son: And she put the skins of the kids of the goats upon his hands, and upon the smooth of his neck: And she gave the savoury meat and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob.

“And he came unto his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I; who art thou, my son? And Jacob said unto his father, I am Esau thy first born; I have done according as thou badest me: arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me. And Isaac said unto his son, How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son? And he said, Because the LORD thy God brought it to me. And Isaac said unto Jacob, Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esau or not. And Jacob went near unto Isaac his father; and he felt him, and said, The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau. And he discerned him not, because his hands were hairy, as his brother Esau’s hands: so he blessed him. And he said, Art thou my very son Esau? And he said, I am. And he said, Bring it near to me, and I will eat of my son’s venison, that my soul may bless thee. And he brought it near to him, and he did eat: and he brought him wine and he drank. And his father Isaac said unto him, Come near now, and kiss me, my son. And he came near, and kissed him: and he smelled the smell of his raiment, and blessed him, and said, See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the LORD hath blessed: Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine: Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother’s sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee.

“And it came to pass, as soon as Isaac had made an end of blessing Jacob, and Jacob was yet scarce gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting. And he also had made savoury meat, and brought it unto his father, and said unto his father, Let my father arise, and eat of his son’s venison, that thy soul may bless me. And Isaac his father said unto him, Who art thou? And he said, I am

Jews are called, as we are called, to avoid sin and to cleanse themselves from it when they fall into it. The rites of purification serve to minimize contamination on a physical level among the Jews, but are unable to cleanse their souls. It took the shedding of the blood of Christ to do that. But even then, if we insist on clinging to cares and allures of this world, we remain contaminated by exposure to death.

The Christian rite of baptism is a purification ritual. It serves to allay the power of original sin and set us on the path to life. It incorporates us into the body of Christ, both in his death and in his resurrection. So let us not look back, like Lot’s wife, on the doomed city from which we have been rescued.

The dead works that the passage refers to are not only sins, they are good works that have an effect only in the world that is passing away. They are dead because the world in which they have an effect is dead. St. Paul in I Corinthians talks about a few good things that are destined to pass away: prophecies shall fail, tongues shall cease, knowledge shall vanish. All that endure are faith, hope, and love. Those are the things we really need to focus on and cultivate.

Dead works are a burden on our conscience and tend to distract our attention from the things that really matter. They need to be purged in order to free us for the service of God. That is why we have Lent with its call to repentance and abstinence. That is why we have confession, both public and private. That is why we need forgiveness.

It is the blood of Christ that brings us that forgiveness. It is the blood of Christ that purges our conscience of the dead works that haunt us: “For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

Corpses emit germs that can cause typhoid fever, tuberculosis, and various other diseases. That's why we wash them, embalm them, mummify them, or burn them before they begin to rot. That's also why priests in the Old Testament were careful to avoid them because the purification ritual, described in the Book of Numbers, took seven days, and during that time the contaminated man was not permitted to enter the Temple.<sup>6</sup>

But it is not just for hygienic reasons that dead things are to be avoided. In the Bible, from the very beginning, death is associated with sin. God tells Adam and Eve that the day they eat of the forbidden fruit is the day they become mortal. "The sting of death is sin," says St. Paul. Without sin there would be no death.

The association between sin and death helps explain why Jesus says something that sounds cruel and harsh to man whose father had recently died. In Matthew 8 and again in Luke 9, Jesus calls a man to join the company of the Apostles. The man says, "First let me go and bury my father." And Jesus replies, "Let the dead bury their own dead."

The implication is that the whole world is doomed as the result of Adam's sin. If we want to be part of the Kingdom of God, if we want to inherit eternal life, we cannot cling to the things that are associated with a dying world. To be part of God's new creation, we have to let go of the old. We can't do that completely of course. We are stuck in this world until we die, and as long as we are stuck in this world, we are stuck in the clutches of what we call "original sin."

We can avoid contact with dead bodies, but we cannot avoid contact with a dying world. On the other hand we do not have to go running to it either. We can follow the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: "Do not lay up treasure in a world that is subject to corruption and decay. Lay up treasure in Heaven, where there is no corruption or decay."

thy son, thy firstborn Esau. And Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and said, Who? where is he that hath taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? yea, and he shall be blessed. And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father. And he said, Thy brother came with subtilty, and hath taken away thy blessing. And he said, Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing. And he said, Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me? And Isaac answered and said unto Esau, Behold, I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants; and with corn and wine have I sustained him: and what shall I do now unto thee, my son? And Esau said unto his father, Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, even me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice, and wept. And Isaac his father answered and said unto him, Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above; And by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck."

*Or,*

Here beginneth the eleventh Verse of the fourth Chapter of the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus.<sup>4</sup>

"... Wisdom exalteth her children, and layeth hold of them that seek her. He that loveth her loveth life; and they that seek to her early shall be filled with joy. He that holdeth her fast shall inherit glory; and wheresoever she entereth, the Lord will bless. They that serve her shall minister to the Holy One: and them that love her the Lord doth love. Whoso giveth ear unto her shall judge the nations: and he that attendeth unto her shall dwell securely. If a man commit himself unto her, he shall inherit her; and his generation shall hold her in possession. For at the first she will walk with him by crooked ways, and bring

fear and dread upon him, and torment him with her discipline, until she may trust his soul, and try him by her laws. Then will she return the straight way unto him, and comfort him, and shew [SHOW] him her secrets. But if he go wrong, she will forsake him, and give him over to his own ruin. Observe the opportunity, and beware of evil; and be not ashamed when it concerneth thy soul. For there is a shame that bringeth sin; and there is a shame which is glory and grace. Accept no person against thy soul, and let not the reverence of any man cause thee to fall. And refrain not to speak, when there is occasion to do good, and hide not thy wisdom in her beauty. For by speech wisdom shall be known: and learning by the word of the tongue. In no wise speak against the truth; but be ashamed of the error of thine ignorance. Be not ashamed to confess thy sins; and force not the course of the river. Make not thyself an underling to a foolish man; neither accept the person of the mighty. Strive for the truth unto death, and the Lord shall fight for thee.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the eleventh Verse of the ninth Chapter of the Epistle of the Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews.<sup>5</sup>

“... Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the

promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, Saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

### **Homily:**

The Second Lesson today was written to people who were familiar with Jewish rituals and customs. One such ritual that is referred to in the Lesson is the purification ritual for people who have come in contact with dead bodies.

Why do people who come in contact with dead bodies need to be purified? Well, for one thing there is a health issue.