

**SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER**  
**The Fourth Sunday after Trinity<sup>1</sup>**

**The Rev. Warren E. Shaw,<sup>2</sup> Supply Priest**

**Lessons:<sup>3</sup>**

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the twelfth Chapter of the First Book of Samuel.<sup>4</sup>

“And Samuel said unto all Israel, Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you. And now, behold, the king walketh before you: and I am old and grayheaded; and, behold, my sons are with you: and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day. Behold, here I am: witness against me before the LORD, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you. And they said, Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man’s hand. And he said unto them, The LORD is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that ye have not found ought in my hand. And they answered, He is witness.

“And Samuel said unto the people, It is the LORD that advanced Moses and Aaron, and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt. Now therefore stand still, that I may reason with you before the LORD of all the righteous acts of the LORD, which he did to you and to your fathers. When Jacob was come into Egypt, and your fathers cried unto the LORD, then the LORD sent Moses and Aaron, which brought forth your fathers out of Egypt, and made them dwell in this place. And when they forgat the LORD their God, he sold them into the hand of Sisera [**SISS-urr-uh**], captain of the host of Hazor [**HAY-zoar**], and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab, and they fought against them. And they cried unto the LORD, and said, We have sinned, because we

have forsaken the LORD, and have served Baalim [**BAY-uh-limb**] and Ashtaroth [**ASH-tuh-rahth**]: but now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, and we will serve thee. And the LORD sent Jerubbaal [**dgerr-uh-BAY-ull**], and Bedan [**BEE-dann**], and Jephthah [**JEFF-thuh**], and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and ye dwelled safe. And when ye saw that Nahash [**NAY-hash**] the king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said unto me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us: when the LORD your God was your king. Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen, and whom ye have desired! and, behold, the LORD hath set a king over you. If ye will fear the LORD, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the LORD your God: But if ye will not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall the hand of the LORD be against you, as it was against your fathers.

“Now therefore stand and see this great thing, which the LORD will do before your eyes. Is it not wheat harvest to day? I will call unto the LORD, and he shall send thunder and rain; that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking you a king. So Samuel called unto the LORD; and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel. And all the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the LORD thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king.

“And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart; And turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are vain. For the LORD will not forsake his people for his great name’s sake: because it hath pleased the LORD to make you his people. Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way: Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for

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

<sup>4</sup> I Samuel 12:1-end (KJV).

<sup>5</sup> Job 39:1-end (KJV).

<sup>6</sup> St. Mark 6:1-32 (KJV).

<sup>7</sup> St. Mark 6:12-13.

“holy”. I am not such a priest, and I trust that this parish is not such a church.

I hope that your vision for your parish will be that of a community that welcomes sinners of every kind and calls them to repentance. I hope your vision will be that of a community in which people come to know what it means to be forgiven and liberated from the tyranny of sin. I hope you will see yourselves as a community that confronts the evil powers of the world and asserts authority over them, a community that heals the sick and offers hope to the hopeless and wholeness to those who are broken.

I hope you will see your mission as a congregation in terms of this text: “They went out and preached that people should repent. And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them.” That is what Jesus sent His Apostles out to do, and that is what they did, in His Name.

I hope that you will always honor that Name and obey His commands and give glory to the Father through him. May God the Holy Spirit enable you to do all of that and guide you in your search for a priest who will lead you to the fulfillment of such a vision.

Amen.

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St. Thomas Episcopal Church  
Orange, Virginia

July 13, 2006

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<sup>1</sup> This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, Year B, according to the Revised Three-Year Common Lectionary.

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<sup>3</sup> *An Alternative Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised in 1928)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, WITH THE ADDITIONS AND DEVIATIONS

consider how great things he hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king.”

*Or,*

Here beginneth the thirty-ninth Chapter of the Book of Job.<sup>5</sup>

“Knowest thou the time when the wild goats of the rock bring forth? or canst thou mark when the hinds do calve? Canst thou number the months that they fulfil? or knowest thou the time when they bring forth? They bow themselves, they bring forth their young ones, they cast out their sorrows. Their young ones are in good liking, they grow up with corn; they go forth, and return not unto them. Who hath sent out the wild ass free? or who hath loosed the bands of the wild ass? Whose house I have made the wilderness, and the barren land his dwellings. He scorneth the multitude of the city, neither regardeth he the crying of the driver. The range of the mountains is his pasture, and he searcheth after every green thing. Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee, or abide by thy crib? Canst thou bind the unicorn with his band in the furrow? or will he harrow the valleys after thee? Wilt thou trust him, because his strength is great? or wilt thou leave thy labour to him? Wilt thou believe him, that he will bring home thy seed, and gather it into thy barn? Gavest thou the goodly wings unto the peacocks? or wings and feathers unto the ostrich? Which leaveth her eggs in the earth, and warmeth them in dust, And forgetteth that the foot may crush them, or that the wild beast may break them. She is hardened against her young ones, as though they were not her’s: her labour is in vain without fear; Because God hath deprived her of wisdom, neither hath he imparted to her understanding. What time she lifteth up herself on high, she scorneth the horse and his rider. Hast thou given the horse strength? hast thou clothed his neck with thunder? Canst thou make him afraid as a grasshopper? the glory of his nostrils is terrible. He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in his strength: he goeth on to meet the armed men. He mocketh at fear, and is not af-

frighted; neither turneth he back from the sword. The quiver rattleth against him, the glittering spear and the shield. He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage: neither believeth he that it is the sound of the trumpet. He saith [SETH] among the trumpets, Ha, ha; and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting. Doth the hawk fly by thy wisdom, and stretch her wings toward the south? Doth the eagle mount up at thy command, and make her nest on high? She dwelleth and abideth on the rock, upon the crag of the rock, and the strong place. From thence she seeketh the prey, and her eyes behold afar off. Her young ones also suck up blood: and where the slain are, there is she.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the sixth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Mark.<sup>6</sup>

“And he went out from thence, and came into his own country; and his disciples follow him. And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house. And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. And he marvelled because of their unbelief. And he went round about the villages, teaching.

“And he called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits; And commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse: But be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats. And he said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into an

Do you remember the young man who told Jesus that he had obeyed every commandment in the book but knew there was something missing in his relationship to God? Do you remember that story? Jesus told him his problem. His problem was he had too much money and he needed to give it away. But the man could not bring himself to do that, so he went away “sorrowing” as the Gospel says. And Jesus let him go.

Well, maybe there’s something in your life that’s keeping you from living a spiritually robust life. It could be jealousy. Maybe it’s greed. Perhaps it’s arrogance, or promiscuity, or fear, or bitterness. It could be any number of things. But whatever it that is coming between you and God you have to be willing to let go of it. God is not going to take your sins away from you by force if you insist on holding on to them.

“So [the apostles] went out and preached that people should repent. And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them.”

One more point before I stop.

When a parish prepares to call a rector, as part of that process it is asked to write a parish profile that will describe it as it sees itself, and as it hopes to become. All of its members are asked to provide some input into the writing of that profile. A major part of it is a vision of what they believe a church ought to be.

There are those in some churches today who believe that repentance is not necessary. They believe that people are the way they are because that’s how God made them and we need to accept that and affirm them just as they are. They define sin out of existence. Instead of offering healing, I regret to say, some churches, some clergy, and even some bishops simply deny that people are sick. Instead of driving out the unclean spirits they simply surrender to them and call those spirits

You know that men hate to ask for directions or to read directions, or generally to ask for help. It seems to be easier for women. I think it's because we believe our manhood is involved. Real men, we think, are independent and strong and capable of taking care of themselves. But when it comes to dealing with sin, we are not strong, and we are not independent, and we are not capable of taking care of ourselves. Men may have more trouble facing up to that than women do, but it's true of all of us. Nobody likes to admit that he, or she, is wrong, but sometimes we are, and the sooner we admit that the sooner God is able to help us.

Repentance is more than just being sorry for the results of what we have done. It involves renunciation of whatever is drawing us away from God. The sad fact is that we like our sins and we don't really want to give them up. We want to come closer to God, but we don't want to let go of the things that are hindering us. That's like saying that we want to lose weight but we don't want to exercise or give up eating candy bars and ice cream.

You have to renounce the candy bars and ice cream if you want to lose weight, and you have to renounce your sins if you want to be spiritually healthy. Renouncing your sins, like renouncing candy and ice cream, does not mean that you will never indulge in them again. What it means that you no longer want them to dominate your life or control its direction, and you're willing to do what it takes to be out from under their tyranny.

What it takes to do that is the power of God. What it takes is the power that Jesus gave to His Apostles, which the Gospel calls "authority over the unclean spirits". You have to place yourself in the hands of God as you would place yourself in the hands of a competent surgeon and allow him to remove what you have identified as keeping you from being spiritually healthy.

house, there abide till ye depart from that place. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrhah in the day of judgment, than for that city. And they went out, and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them. And king Herod heard of him; (for his name was spread abroad:) and he said, That John the Baptist was risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do shew [SHOW] forth themselves in him. Others said, That it is Elias. And others said, That it is a prophet, or as one of the prophets. But when Herod heard thereof, he said, It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead. For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for he had married her. For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife. Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him; but she could not: For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly. And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee; And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee. And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom. And she went forth, and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist. And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that thou give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist. And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her. And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and beheaded him in the prison, And brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel: and the damsel

gave it to her mother. And when his disciples heard of it, they came and took up his corpse, and laid it in a tomb. And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught. And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. And they departed into a desert place by ship privately.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

### **Text:**

From the Second Lesson: “They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them”<sup>7</sup> In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

### **Homily:**

Few people in modern America believe in demons as a source of either mental or physical illness. So what are we to make of this passage? Do we have to suspend our knowledge of medical practices and scientific research in order to take this passage seriously?

Obviously I do not think so. I believe that there are intangible forces at work in the world that drive people to addictions, to irrational and compulsive behaviors, and to delusions. I also believe that the physical, the mental, the emotional, and the spiritual aspects of human nature are all connected in a way that they interact and influence each other.

We can call these forces by scientific names, but, if the scientists present will forgive me, I think scientific terminology is boring. The imagery of exorcism is a far more interesting way of talking about them.

Modern technology makes it easier in some ways to deal with these intangible forces that, in the words of the baptismal service, “corrupt and destroy the creatures of God”. But I suggest that the basic process is still the same. We identify these forces, name them, confront them, and finally assert authority over them. That is what the Apostles did in Jesus’ Name. That’s how you cast out demons.

The Apostles also did something else in Jesus’ name—something that I believe is related to exorcism. They called people to repentance, which is to say, they called them to renounce the evil forces that were leading them away from God. The overall theological name for such forces is “sin”. The itemized list includes more attitudes than actual acts, but the way to deal with all of them is to repent.

Repentance means that you recognize and acknowledge your sins. Denial, as the saying goes, is not just a river in Egypt. If you deny that you have a physical problem you will never be cured. If you deny that you have a mental problem, you will never be cured. If you deny that you have a spiritual problem, and sin is a spiritual problem, you will never be rid of that problem.

St. John says, “If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins [God] is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Have you got that? God will cleanse us. God will heal us. He will make us whole. But first we have to admit that we have a problem and we need his help.

That’s not an easy thing to do, and it seems especially hard for men. In the Greek text the subject of the verb “repent” is understood and not specifically expressed. It could be translated as “people should repent” or simply as “they should repent”. But I think the King James translators and the RSV translators were on to something when they translated it as “men should repent.”