

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER
Easter Day

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Priest-in-Charge

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fifty-first Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.²

“Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him. For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.

“Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people. My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.

“Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.

“Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab [**RAY-habb**], and wounded the

dragon? Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over? Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away. I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; And forgettest the LORD thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor? The captive exile hasteneth that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail. But I am the LORD thy God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared: The LORD of hosts is his name. And I have put my words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people.”

Or,

Here beginneth the fourteenth Chapter of the Second Book of Moses, called Exodus.³

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they turn and encamp before Pihahiroth [pye-huh-HYE-raath], between Migdol [**MIG-doll**] and the sea, over against Baalzephon [**BAY-ull ZEE-funn**]: before it shall ye encamp by the sea. For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in. And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD. And they did so.

“And it was told the king of Egypt that the people fled: and the heart of Pharaoh and of his servants was turned against

the people, and they said, Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us? And he made ready his chariot, and took his people with him: And he took six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, and captains over every one of them. And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel: and the children of Israel went out with an high hand. But the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pihahiroth [pye-huh-HYE-raath], before Baalzephon [**BAY-ull ZEE-funn**].

“And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD. And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.

“And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew [**SHOW**] to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward: But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten me honour upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen.

“And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the

cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night. And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.

“And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, And took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians.

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them. But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore. And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

“O God, whose blessed Son did manifest himself to his disciples in the breaking of bread; open, we pray thee, the eyes of our faith, that we may behold thee in all thy works; though the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

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St. David’s Anglican Catholic Church
Charlottesville, Virginia

April 8, 2012

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 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).

² Isaiah 51:1-16 (KJV).

³ Exodus 14:1-end (KJV).

⁴ St. John 20:1-23 (KJV).

⁵ Colossians 3:2.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twentieth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John.⁴

“The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene [magg-duh-LEE-knee] early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith [**SETH**] unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him. Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home.

“But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith [**SETH**] unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith [**SETH**] unto her, Woman, why weep-est thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith [**SETH**] unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni [ra-BOW-nye]; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith [**SETH**] unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God,

Thomas needed help in dealing with spiritual reality. Jesus accommodated him by appearing and displaying His wounds. He then said, “Thomas, you have believed because you have seen me. Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe.”

Well, that’s us. At least it’s those of us who are able to perceive what cannot be measured, or quantified, or comprehended with our finite minds and our limited senses.

If you are such a person, St. Paul says to you as he says to the Colossians, to focus on those things. “Set your minds,” he says, “on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”⁵ Your faith, in other words, should make a difference in the way you think and in the way you live.

On the other hand, if you are not able to get beyond your own finitude, the Apostle says this about you: “The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them, for they are spiritually discerned.”

The gifts of the Spirit, of which he speaks, are manifold and are catalogued elsewhere in his writings, but today we focus on the one gift that most of us value above all. We say in the creed that the Holy Spirit is “the Lord and giver of life”, and we mean by that that the Spirit not only breathes life into us at our conception, but also that He unites us to Jesus in His death and in His Resurrection from the dead.

The gift of eternal life with Jesus in glory is available to all who are willing to receive it in faith, setting aside the limitations we impose on ourselves when we focus attention on what we can see and touch. It is for such faith that I will now pray in behalf of all present, and with this prayer I will conclude.

and your God. Mary Magdalene [*magg-duh-LEE-knee*] came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her.

“Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he shewed [**SHOWD**] unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith [**SETH**] unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

In this evening’s Second Lesson, two of Our Lord’s disciples go looking for His dead body. They don’t find it. All they find is the shroud in which His body was wrapped when it was placed in the tomb.

Whether or not The Shroud of Turin is actually that shroud does not interest me. What does interest me is the fact that no search for His dead body, and there been many, has ever been successful because Jesus is alive.

Now when I say that I don’t mean that the body which Jesus once occupied has been resuscitated. It has not been resuscitated; it has been transformed. It has been transformed into what St. Paul calls “a spiritual body.”

Spiritual entities are not subject to the laws of physics as we know them. The resurrection body of Jesus is as able to pass through solid objects, as it did when he appeared on Easter night in a locked room. His resurrection body is able to appear

and disappear quickly as it did on the road to Emmaus [*ee-MAY-uss*] and in other places far away from each other.

There was a period of forty days after Easter when Jesus presented His resurrection body to His disciples. At the end of that forty day period, His body ascended to the heavenly regions, and has been represented on earth ever since by The Holy Spirit.

In His resurrection body, Jesus is able seated in glory at the right hand of the Father in Heaven, and still He is represented by The Holy Spirit in the small group of two or three people gathered in His name in a basement somewhere. He is in a cell with the prisoner who prays for forgiveness and strength, and also with the suffering orphan in Haiti. He is with the Coptic Christians in Egypt whose churches have been burned and whose lives have been threatened. He is also with everyone who calls upon Him in the moment of his or her death.

The body of Jesus is still able to present itself to our senses in various ways, but especially in the bread and wine that we call upon God to bless in His name. But His body and blood can only be discerned by faith.

In order for us to perceive the presence of the living Jesus, we need to be able to get outside of our finitude and of our own bondage to time and to space and to physicality. We need to understand that there are realities in the universe beyond what we can measure and perceive with our physical senses. We need to be receptive to such realities. And we especially need to be able to accept the testimony of those who were specifically chosen by Jesus to be witnesses of His resurrection.

There are people who do not seem to be able to do that. St. Thomas was one of them. When told that some of his fellow disciples had seen Jesus alive, Thomas said, “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.”