

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
The Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity

The Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-third Chapter of the Second Book of the Kings, commonly called the Fourth Book of the Kings.³

“And the king sent, and they gathered unto him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem. And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD.

“And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant. And the king commanded Hilkiah [*hill-KYE-uh*] the high priest, and the priests of the second order, and the keepers of the door, to bring forth out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the grove, and for all the host of heaven: and he burned them without Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron [*KID-run*], and carried the ashes of them unto Bethel [*BETH-ull*]. And he put down the idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem; them also that burned incense unto Baal [*BAY-ull*], to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven. And he brought out the grove from the house of the LORD, without Jerusalem, unto the brook Kidron [*KID-run*], and burned it at the brook Kidron [*KID-run*], and stamped it small to powder, and cast the powder thereof upon the graves of the children of the people. And he brake down the houses of the sodomites, that were by the house of the LORD,

where the women wove hangings for the grove. And he brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah, and defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense, from Geba [DGEE-buh] to Beersheba [BEA-air-SHE-buh], and brake down the high places of the gates that were in the entering in of the gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which were on a man's left hand at the gate of the city. Nevertheless the priests of the high places came not up to the altar of the LORD in Jerusalem, but they did eat of the unleavened bread among their brethren. And he defiled Topheth [TOE-feth], which is in the valley of the children of Hinnom [HINN-ahmm], that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech [MOE-leck]. And he took away the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun, at the entering in of the house of the LORD, by the chamber of Nathanmelech [NAY-thun-MEE-leck] the chamberlain, which was in the suburbs, and burned the chariots of the sun with fire. And the altars that were on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz [AY-hazz], which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the LORD, did the king beat down, and brake them down from thence, and cast the dust of them into the brook Kidron [KID-run]. And the high places that were before Jerusalem, which were on the right hand of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had builded for Ashtoreth [ASH-tuh-reth] the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh [KEY-mahsh] the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom [MILL-calm] the abomination of the children of Ammon [AMM-unn], did the king defile. And he brake in pieces the images, and cut down the groves, and filled their places with the bones of men.

“Moreover the altar that was at Bethel [BETH-ull], and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat [KNEE-bat], who made Israel to sin, had made, both that altar and the high place he brake down, and burned the high place, and stamped it small to powder, and burned the grove. And as Josiah turned himself, he spied the sepulchres that were there in the mount, and sent, and took the bones out of the sepulchres, and burned them upon the altar, and polluted it, according to the word of

the LORD which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words. Then he said, What title is that that I see? And the men of the city told him, It is the sepulchre of the man of God, which came from Judah, and proclaimed these things that thou hast done against the altar of Bethel [**BETH-ull**]. And he said, Let him alone; let no man move his bones. So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet that came out of Samaria. And all the houses also of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke the Lord to anger, Josiah took away, and did to them according to all the acts that he had done in Bethel [**BETH-ull**]. And he slew all the priests of the high places that were there upon the altars, and burned men's bones upon them, and returned to Jerusalem.

“And the king commanded all the people, saying, Keep the passover unto the LORD your God, as it is written in the book of this covenant. Surely there was not holden such a passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah; But in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, wherein this passover was holden to the LORD in Jerusalem.

“Moreover the workers with familiar spirits, and the wizards, and the images, and the idols, and all the abominations that were spied in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, did Josiah put away, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiyah [**hill-KYE-uh**] the priest found in the house of the LORD. And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him.

“Notwithstanding the LORD turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal. And the LORD said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there. Now the rest of the acts of Josiah,

and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?

“In his days Pharaohnechoh [**FAY-roe-KNEE-coe**] king of Egypt went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates: and king Josiah went against him; and he slew him at Megiddo [**mih-GIDD-owe**], when he had seen him. And his servants carried him in a chariot dead from Megiddo [**mih-GIDD-owe**], and brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own sepulchre. And the people of the land took Jehoahaz [**dgih-HOE-uh-hazz**] the son of Josiah, and anointed him, and made him king in his father’s stead.”

Or,

Here beginneth the thirty-sixth Chapter of the Second Book of the Chronicles.⁴

“Then the people of the land took Jehoahaz [**dgih-HOE-uh-hazz**] the son of Josiah, and made him king in his father’s stead in Jerusalem. Jehoahaz [**dgih-HOE-uh-hazz**] was twenty and three years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. And the king of Egypt put him down at Jerusalem, and condemned the land in an hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold. And the king of Egypt made Eliakim [**ih-LYE-uh-kimm**] his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem, and turned his name to Jehoiakim [**dgih-HOY-uh-kimm**]. And Necho [**KNEE-coe**] took Jehoahaz [**dgih-HOE-uh-hazz**] his brother, and carried him to Egypt.

“Jehoiakim [**dgih-HOY-uh-kimm**] was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem: and he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD his God. Against him came up Nebuchadnezzar [**nebb-you-kad-NEZZ-urr**] king of Babylon, and bound him in fetters, to carry him to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar [**nebb-you-kad-NEZZ-urr**] also carried of the vessels of the house of the LORD to Babylon, and put them in his temple at Babylon. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim [**dgih-HOY-uh-kimm**], and his abominations which he did, and that which was found in him,

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on Septuagesima Sunday, 2013.

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

³ II Kings 23:1-30 (KJV).

⁴ II Chronicles 36:1-21 (KJV).

⁵ Habakkuk 3:2-end (KJV).

⁶ St. Matthew 20:1-28 (KJV).

⁷ St. Matthew 20:15-16 (KJV).

⁸ St. Matthew 20:1 (KJV).

⁹ St. Matthew 20:4 (KJV).

¹⁰ St. Matthew 20:13-15 (KJV).

¹¹ St. Matthew 20:15 (KJV).

¹² St. Matthew 20:15 (KJV).

¹³ Supply Priest, Holy Angels Anglican Catholic Mission, Picayune, MS, and Christ Church Anglican Catholic Pro Cathedral Church, Metairie, LA.

“Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own,”¹¹ responded the vineyard owner to the protestations of the workers who somehow felt slighted.

While he owed no explanation to anyone, he pointed out that he might do as he pleased with that which was his own. So, too, may God do as He pleases with His own. The land owner then asked the question that condemned those who questioned him: “Is thine eye evil, because I am good?”¹²

Do you see evil in me because I do good to others? Is your sense of self-importance and self-worth so greatly inflated that you impugn evil when I do good to another? What becomes then of humility, of charity and of kindness?

What a blessing indeed that it is not our sense of justice that prevails in heaven, but God’s. What a mercy that God so often gives us not what we have earned or deserved, but what we need, as the owner of the vineyard gave some workers not the hour’s wage they had earned but the day’s wage they needed to feed themselves and their families.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, we thank thee that Thy mercy is not as human mercy, but is that sense of mercy as comes from Him who sees all, knows all, considers all. Remind us always, as St. Paul tells Your church at Corinth, that we should run that we obtain, and that we strive not for worldly things, subject to worldly corruption, but for those incorruptible things which can come only from You. This we ask of your incomparable mercy. *Amen.*

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The Rev’d Larry Wagoner, MSW¹³
January 27, 2013

behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah: and Jehoiachin [dgih-HOY-uh-kinn] his son reigned in his stead.

“Jehoiachin [dgih-HOY-uh-kinn] was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem: and he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD. And when the year was expired, king Nebuchadnezzar [nebb-you-kad-NEZZ-urr] sent, and brought him to Babylon, with the goodly vessels of the house of the LORD, and made Zedekiah [zed-ih-KYE-uh] his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem.

“Zedekiah [zed-ih-KYE-uh] was one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the LORD. And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar [nebb-you-kad-NEZZ-urr], who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the LORD God of Israel.

“Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the LORD which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy. Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees [**KOLL-deez**], who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave them all into his hand. And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes; all these he brought to Babylon. And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. And them that had

escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years.”

Or,

Here beginneth the second Verse of the third Chapter of Habakkuk.⁵

“... O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy. God came from Teman [**TEE-mahn**], and the Holy One from mount Paran [**PAY-runn**]. Selah [**SEA-luh**]. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power. Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet. He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting. I saw the tents of Cushan [**KYOU-shan**] in affliction: and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble. Was the LORD displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the rivers? was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses and thy chariots of salvation? Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy word. Selah [**SEA-luh**]. Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers. The mountains saw thee, and they trembled: the overflowing of the water passed by: the deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high. The sun and moon stood still in their habitation: at the light of thine arrows they went, and at the shining of thy glittering spear. Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the heathen in anger. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundedst the head out of the

All the day long, Jesus says, the homeowner went out every few hours to bring in more workers to toil in his vineyard. Even up to the eleventh hour, he still sent more workers into his vineyard to labor. Finally, when the day was done, it was time for the laborers to be paid, and to each worker the homeowner gave the very same “penny”—that is, silver *denarius*—of wage. This equality of wage outraged the men who had been laboring all day, who proceeded to grumble about their pay, complaining that it was not fair that those who came to the vineyard late and worked but a short time would receive the same wage as those who had labored all day in the hot sun.

But the homeowner brought them up short: “*But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?*”¹⁰

In one fell swoop he undercut their entire complaint. First, the laborers had each, individually agreed to the wage that he, in fact, received. Their agreement was not some group activity, nor was it subject to vague general senses of fairness, but was rather a personal agreement between each worker and the owner for a day’s labor. God, of course, relates to each of us individually within our hearts and souls.

Too, the vineyard owner pointed out that he can do what he liked with his own. So it also is with grace. God can do as He pleases. We know through the Gospels and the grace of our Baptisms that God wishes for each of us to labor with and for Him all of our days, and He promises us the reward of heaven.

But if we labor faithfully throughout a long life, we earn no more than does that Christian who lives only a brief time, or who comes to Christianity late in life, and in either case therefore labors less in some quantitative sense than we did. In the final accounting, the reward is the same.

to feel that he should take into account how long each worked when calculating what they may have earned.

God, however, does not work to rule. God is not worried about being perceived as arbitrary, or about being accused of being discriminatory, or about being criticized because He does not guarantee equality of outcomes. So Jesus turns on its head our earthly, human sense of “fairness” and reminds us that we, as servants of God, must trust God to do as He wills. We must spend our concern ensuring not that we dictate what God should do, but rather that we do what God wills.

*“The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder,”*⁸ He begins. This householder hired on some workers early in the morning, then more in a few hours, and still more in later hours of the day, each time assuring them, *“Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you.”*⁹

That is the clue to what was going on here: it all turns on **how** one defines what is “right”, and **who** it is who gets to define what is right. The householder in this parable is, of course, God. The work that He was assigning in the vineyard was the passing down of the Gospel from age to age into the world, which is the vineyard itself. With each of these workers, the homeowner promised what is “right” and what turned out to be “right” was a penny. But that was not what you or I know as a penny, one of those silly little zinc coins, washed with a thin coating of copper, that can buy precisely nothing.

Those who heard Jesus’ words would have easily enough understood the tale and the wages involved. A penny for a day of work was a normal wage in the time. The penny was the Roman silver coin that was commonly used as a day’s wages. Thus the story would have prompted in Jesus’ hearers the very same sense of injustice that we may feel on hearing this story. But our Lord leads the hearers through to find a very different conclusion than we may have come to at first.

house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. Selah [SEA-luh]. Thou didst strike through with his staves the head of his villages: they came out as a whirlwind to scatter me: their rejoicing was as to devour the poor secretly. Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses, through the heap of great waters. When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops.

“Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds’ feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twentieth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.⁶

“The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-place, and said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his

steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

“And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again.

“Then came to him the mother of Zebedee’s children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith [SETH] unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith [SETH] unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father. And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren. But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority

upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “*Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.*”⁷ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

What a blessing that it is not our sense of justice that prevails in heaven, but God’s.

It is a natural thing for us to feel sympathy for the workers in the parable Jesus tells. Some had worked all day in the hot sun picking and working in the vineyard. Others worked only a short time, and yet they received the same wages as did those who worked and sweated all day.

The situation somehow offends our sense of fairness, and of propriety. We intuitively feel that those who worked longer hours, who spent their whole day working rather than only a short time, somehow deserve more.

We jump then to the conclusion that the man who owned the vineyard and paid the workers was wrong for paying them all the same amount. Our modern notions of equality, based as they are on the fungibility of every man and woman and expressed as they are in civil service classifications of “fairness” and labor union work rules about “seniority”, lead us