

**SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER**  
**The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity<sup>1</sup>**

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

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the fourth Verse of the third Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel.<sup>3</sup>

“And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them. For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of an hard language, but to the house of Israel; Not to many people of a strange speech and of an hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee. But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted. Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house. Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears. And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith [SETH] the Lord GOD; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear. Then the spirit took me up, and I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of the LORD from his place. I heard also the noise of the wings of the living creatures that touched one another, and the noise of the wheels over against them, and a noise of a great rushing. So the spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the LORD was strong upon me.

“Then I came to them of the captivity at Tel-abib [*tell-AY-bibb*], that dwelt by the river of Chebar [*KEY-barr*], and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days. And it came to pass at the end of seven days, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear

Dear Lord, as You have loved us, so let us love Your creation, following Your commandment that we love one another. Remind us always that we seek to see You in others, and have them see You in us. Let us always show forth Your love in all that we do, Lord. This we ask in the Name of Him who loved us that we might be saved, the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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The Rev. Larry Wagoner, MSW<sup>12</sup>  
June 9, 2013

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<sup>1</sup> This sermon was originally written on the Epistle for Holy Communion on the Second Sunday after Trinity, 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 43 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxix (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxvii (CIPBC 1963).

<sup>3</sup> Ezekiel 3:4-21 (KJV).

<sup>4</sup> Ezekiel 13:1-16 (KJV).

<sup>5</sup> I John 3:1-end (KJV).

<sup>6</sup> I John 3:17-18 (KJV).

<sup>7</sup> I John 3:16 (KJV).

<sup>8</sup> I John 3:18 (KJV).

<sup>9</sup> I John 3:14-15 (KJV).

<sup>10</sup> St. John 13:34-35 (KJV).

<sup>11</sup> I John 3:16 (KJV).

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the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul.”

*Or,*

Here beginneth the thirteenth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel (KJV).<sup>4</sup>

“And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy, and say thou unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts, Hear ye the word of the LORD; Thus saith [SETH] the Lord GOD; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! O Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts. Ye have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the LORD. They have seen vanity and lying divination, saying, The LORD saith [SETH]: and the LORD hath not sent them: and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word. Have ye not seen a vain vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination, whereas ye say, The LORD saith [SETH] it; albeit I have not spoken? Therefore thus saith [SETH] the Lord GOD; Because ye have spoken vanity, and seen lies, therefore, behold, I am against you, saith [SETH] the Lord GOD. And mine hand shall be upon the prophets that see

this means that we give our assent to all the evil that the world can bring to bear upon us when we could have prevented it.

This is direct disobedience of our Lord’s command: “*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*”<sup>10</sup> So not only do we obey our Lord’s own command when we love one another, but in that loving, we give to the world the sign that we are His followers.

“*Agape*” love is an act of the will. It is the willful, conscious decision to love others as God has loved us—**because He has loved us**—and has commanded us to likewise love the rest of His creation. It is not always our first choice or preference to love our fellows. It is God’s choice that we do so.

I am reminded of an elderly gentleman who drove a school bus for the little school I attended as a child. His was a bus filled with ruffians and hooligans, it seemed, and we were always giving him grief of one kind or another.

I will never forget his answer to me one day when, in a fit of fifth grade bravado, I asked him why he was so nice to us, even when we acted so badly. He just looked at me with his weary eyes and said with a grin, “I can’t help it—I just love you!”

It isn’t that we deserve to be loved—we all know that we often do not deserve love. But as God is love and therefore loves His creation, so we as His creation are to love others: “*Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*”<sup>11</sup> This is the mark of the Christian: Love—*agape* love—given freely to God’s creation just as He has given that same love to us.

Let us pray.

love cannot come from the need to own someone, because that ownership itself is destructive to the object of the desire.

No, love is rather the desire for the best for that other. Love is the desire that the other, rather than the self, be uplifted, be rewarded, be celebrated, and experience only the very best of what life can offer. Love is the devoutly-held desire that another be first in all things.

This is that love that the Greeks referred to as “*agape*”, which is self-sacrificial. This is not the romantic love of “*eros*,” nor is it the friendship or brotherly love of “*philia*.” Instead this is the pure love from and of God. It is different in character, nature and expression from the other forms, and is the actual **being** of love.

As St. John tells us, “*Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us.*”<sup>7</sup> How much more sacrificial could God possibly be than to give Himself for us that we could be reconciled to Him and to the Father? Our Lord is the supreme example of love, giving His life for us, by suffering for our sins, though He did no wrong and deserved no punishment.

And, St. John calls us to reflect and display that same kind of “*agape*” love in our own lives: “*My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.*”<sup>8</sup> John’s call to this kind of love follows his caution for what we deserve if we fail to cultivate “*agape*” for our fellows: “*He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.*”<sup>9</sup>

How can it be that the failure to love each other makes us murders? If we cannot love one another, support one another, take care of one another, then we surely cannot protect one another and ensure each other’s safety and well-being. In a world in which we are all under attack from the powers of evil,

vanity, and that divine lies: they shall not be in the assembly of my people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel; and ye shall know that I am the Lord GOD.

“Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar: Say unto them which daub it with untempered mortar, that it shall fall: there shall be an overflowing shower; and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall rend it. Lo, when the wall is fallen, shall it not be said unto you, Where is the daubing wherewith ye have daubed it? Therefore thus saith [SETH] the Lord GOD; I will even rend it with a stormy wind in my fury; and there shall be an overflowing shower in mine anger, and great hailstones in my fury to consume it. So will I break down the wall that ye have daubed with untempered mortar, and bring it down to the ground, so that the foundation thereof shall be discovered, and it shall fall, and ye shall be consumed in the midst thereof: and ye shall know that I am the LORD. Thus will I accomplish my wrath upon the wall, and upon them that have daubed it with untempered mortar, and will say unto you, The wall is no more, neither they that daubed it; To wit, the prophets of Israel which prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and which see visions of peace for her, and there is no peace, saith [SETH] the Lord GOD.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the third Chapter of the First Epistle General of John.<sup>5</sup>

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. Whosoever

committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous. Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his command-

ments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

**Text:**

“But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.”<sup>6</sup> In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Homily:**

Love is surely the most celebrated emotion of all time. Yet with all the songs, the poetry, the novels and stories, it is also one of the most misunderstood and, frankly, misused of emotions as well.

The Greeks tried to dispel these misunderstanding by dividing up the meanings of love into differing relationships. They proposed that “*Eros*” was that rushing, overpowering passionate love between a man and a woman that makes us take leave of our senses and become overwhelmed with passion.

This is the love depicted in literature and music, in which people swoon for each other, and act in all sorts of foolish ways, as if in some kind of trance. But from this state also comes jealousy, and all the evils that attend that possessive insanity that is jealousy.

The ancient Greeks called this love “*Eros*”, which means intimate love, which stems from the need to be one with the other in either a physical or emotional sense. But this kind of love at least implies a sense of possession, of ownership. But