

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER
The Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the eighteenth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel.³

“The word of the LORD came unto me again, saying, What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord GOD, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.

“...

“Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith [SETH] the LORD: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?

“But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.

“Yet ye say, The way of the LORD is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal? When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die. Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die. Yet saith [SETH] the house of Israel, The way of the LORD is not equal. O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith [SETH] the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.

“Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith [SETH] the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.”

Or,

Here beginneth the thirty-third Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel.⁴

“Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, speak to the children of thy people, and say unto them, When I bring the sword upon a land, if the people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman: If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people; Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning; his blood shall be upon him. But he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul. But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and

take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand.

“So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live? Say unto them, As I live, saith [SETH] the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? Therefore, thou son of man, say unto the children of thy people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression: as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness; neither shall the righteous be able to live for his righteousness in the day that he sinneth. When I shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousnesses shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it. Again, when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right; If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him: he hath done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live.

“Yet the children of thy people say, The way of the Lord is not equal: but as for them, their way is not equal. When the righteous turneth from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, he shall even die thereby. But if the wicked turn from his

wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby.

“Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. O ye house of Israel, I will judge you every one after his ways.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fourth Chapter of the First Epistle General of John.⁵

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of anti-christ, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error. Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us.

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The Rev. Mr. Larry Wagoner MSW¹⁰
June 10, 2012

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Epistle for Mass on the First Sunday after Trinity, 2012.

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 44 (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 xxxviii (CIPBC 1963).

³ Ezekiel 18:1-4, 19-end (KJV).

⁴ Ezekiel 33:1-20 (KJV).

⁵ I John 4:1-end (KJV).

⁶ I John 4:7-12 (RSV).

⁷ “The Summary of the Law”, *The Order for The Administration of the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 69 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943). This is a conflation of the slightly different quotations found in St. Matthew 22:37 (KJV), St. Mark 12:30 (KJV), and St. Luke 10:27 (KJV), all of which are based upon Deuteronomy 6:5.

⁸ St. John 15:13 (KJV).

⁹ St. John 3:16 (KJV).

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the Father extended to us the chance that we might live through Him, restored to holiness and our relationship as the very children of God.

In the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the proof of the worth of the human soul in the eyes of God. How else could He have suffered the agony of the Cross, and the sorrows of His blessed death and passion for us? How can the value of this gift ever be understood? In short, it cannot, save by this: *“for God so loved the world that he gave His only-begotten Son, to the end that all who believe in Him might not die, but have everlasting life.”*⁹

And if we have been given this gift beyond all compare, then we owe to Him who gave it to us that we do as He commanded us: *“Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.”*

We do this to demonstrate His Holy Spirit within us and to do our very best to live as His children. We can truly do no less. *“No man hath seen God at any time,”* says St. John, but if we act as His children and show the love to others that we are commanded to show, then others can see God in us.

This is because *“If we love one another, God dwelleth in us.”* He also then acts through us, using us as His tools and representatives in the world. Then is God’s love *“perfected in us,”* states St. John. When we love others as God wills us to, then we show God’s perfect love in our lives.

Let us pray,

O loving Father, who in Your incomparable love for us gave Your only Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ to suffer and die to save us, help us always to show forth that same love to all Your creation in our hearts and lives. Let us thereby demonstrate that we are indeed Your children in the world. This we pray through Your Son, our Lord’s sacrifice of love for us. *Amen.*

God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: *“Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.”*⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

In today’s Second Lesson, we are given a challenge and a goal for which to strive. As we meet that challenge, we begin to understand the nature of God. It is the nature of God to love us, and it is our highest calling to love God in direct return and, in indirect return, to love all His creation.

St. John exhorts us all: *“Beloved, let us love one another.”* Let us each hold each other in the highest esteem, in bonds of affection and respect. It is so easy to find reasons to hold

each other in contempt, or in disregard. We often find the silliest reasons to dislike each other: “My neighbor has absolutely the ugliest flowers in his yard.” “I really hate people who drive too slowly.” Or even one of my favorites: “How could anyone support the Falcons?”

But St. John reminds us that love is of God, and that “*He who loves is born of God and knows God.*” That is because our Lord has taught us first and foremost to love one another. This teaching came both by word and deed. So He said: “*Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it; thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*”⁷ The Lord is our Creator, our very Maker. It is He who gives us life. It is He who makes possible our salvation through the forgiveness of our sin.

Had we abstained from sin in the first place, and not been separated from God, then we all would still live in a state of perfect love and acceptance of each other and of God. Sadly, we did not do so; we rebelled against God in the Fall, and God’s love for us that permits forgiveness became necessary for us to be reconciled with Him.

In order to make that forgiveness possible, the Father gave His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to come and live as a man and to die as one of us—but not the death of the fulfilled old life, but death on the Cross. Our Lord consented to that death and came to live among us as a man, willingly submitting Himself to all the shame, hypocrisy and evil of the world as He taught His disciples, then even went willingly to the Cross to redeem us.

Parents, ask yourselves: which of you could consent to such a thing? Which parent here would be willing to allow his or her only child to die, innocent but in agony, as a criminal, to save others who were not innocent but were, unlike Him,

guilty? Children, ask yourselves: which of you would be willing to do such a thing?

St. John in His Gospel offered that “*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*”⁸ Only someone who truly understands the loving mercy of God could even think of such a thing.

Love, St. John says, is of God. Love comes from and is created and made possible by God. When we show love to others, we demonstrate that we are God’s own, as love can only come when we know God. Also, as love is a godly trait, when we show love to others, we ourselves become more like God. Alternately, when we show hate, envy or malice, we are showing those things which we get from the evil of the world, which God abhors. But love restores us to God, because it is God’s command that we show love to others.

It is worthwhile to draw a distinction here between the kinds of love. The ancient Greeks had four distinct words for love, and they refer to different kinds of love. True, unconditional, sacrificial love such as that between God and man, and reciprocated between man and God, is *agape*. It is the widest, most fulfilling of loves. It is generally *agape* to which the Gospel refers when it uses the word “love”. *Eros* is that passion felt between lovers, and generally refers to a physical longing. *Philia* is friendship or a general love between members of groups, family members or others. Finally, *storge* is natural familial love, expected as part of a relationship.

Without God, *agape* is not possible, though certainly positive feelings towards family, friends and lovers might exist. But as St. John says, “*He that loveth not, knoweth not God.*” Without love, one cannot know God, for God is love. If there were ever need of proof that God is love, St. John states, the proof is found in the Father’s sending His only begotten Son to save His creation from its own sin. There can never be any greater proof of God’s love than this. By the gift of His Son,