

The Rev'd Robert Hart²¹
April 29, 2012.

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Third Sunday after Easter, 2012.

² *The Table of Lessons*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxv (Anglican Church of Canada 1962).

³ Ezekiel 33:21-end (KJV).

⁴ St. John 16:16-22 (KJV).

⁵ Chesterton, G.K., *Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Dumb Ox*, 1933, London.

⁶ Isaiah 53:10.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ St. Luke 24:39.

⁹ St. John 20:27-28.

¹⁰ Romans 8:11.

¹¹ St. John 6:54.

¹² I John 3:2.

¹³ I Corinthians 15:20-23.

¹⁴ Leviticus 23:15-17.

¹⁵ Romans 6:9-10.

¹⁶ I John 3:2b.

¹⁷ I Corinthians 15:19.

¹⁸ Hebrews 13:14.

¹⁹ I Peter 2:11-12a, 15-16.

²⁰ I John 4:10-11,19.

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SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER The Eighth Sunday after Trinity¹ (Year II)

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-first Verse of the the thirty-third Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel.³

“And it came to pass in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the tenth month, in the fifth day of the month, that one that had escaped out of Jerusalem came unto me, saying, The city is smitten. Now the hand of the LORD was upon me in the evening, afore he that was escaped came; and had opened my mouth, until he came to me in the morning; and my mouth was opened, and I was no more dumb. Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, they that inhabit those wastes of the land of Israel speak, saying, Abraham was one, and he inherited the land: but we are many; the land is given us for inheritance. Wherefore say unto them, Thus saith [SETH] the Lord GOD; Ye eat with the blood, and lift up your eyes toward your idols, and shed blood: and shall ye possess the land? Ye stand upon your sword, ye work abomination, and ye defile every one his neighbour's wife: and shall ye possess the land? Say thou thus unto them, Thus saith [SETH] the Lord GOD; As I live, surely they that are in the wastes shall fall by the sword, and him that is in the open field will I give to the beasts to be devoured, and they that be in the forts and in the caves shall die of the pestilence. For I will lay the land most desolate, and the pomp of her strength shall cease; and the mountains of Israel shall be desolate, that none shall pass through. Then shall they know that I am the LORD, when I have laid the land most desolate because of all their abominations which they have committed.

“Also, thou son of man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh

forth from the LORD. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew [SHOW] much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

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

“... A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father. Then said some of his disciples among themselves, What is this that he saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is this that he saith [SETH], A little while? we cannot tell what he saith [SETH]. Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, Do ye enquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me? Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “*A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, be-*

be our Easter; and like Him, all who have looked for His appearing again, all who love God, will enter into His immortality. Though we will have died, we will die no more; Death shall have no more dominion over us; for it has no more dominion over Him. This is our future if we remain *In Christ*.

Paul also wrote, “*If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.*”¹⁷ Modern religion all too often is about feeling good in this life, or being successful in this world, or even about health and prosperity; all of which things, though, they may be good for a time, are ultimately worthless; for this life ends. “*Here we have no abiding place.*”¹⁸ These words that Jesus spoke mean so much more. They mean everything.

Without this hope of the Gospel, St. Peter’s words in his First Epistle General would come across as mere moral platitudes. But, in the context of Christianity, of the Gospel and our Risen Living Lord, they take on lively and powerful meaning: “*Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your conversation honest among the Gentiles.... For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: as free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.*”¹⁹

In the context of eternal life, every commandment takes on new meaning. That meaning is, “*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.... We love him, because he first loved us.*”²⁰

For a brief while they did not see Him, and then they saw Him. “*A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father.*”

my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”¹¹

For “*we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is,*” wrote St. John.¹² St. Paul, writing to the Church in Corinth, says: “*But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming.*”¹³

The imagery is from the harvest. In spring we have the first fruits, that first growth of the field; it is a foretaste of what comes later in the harvest. It fulfilled the meaning of the feast of the firstfruits in the Book of Leviticus.¹⁴ The feast of the first fruits was directly after the first Sabbath that followed the Pass-over. No coincidence that.

After the Sabbath they were to present the first fruits, just as Christ would rise and appear to witnesses *after* the Sabbath, on the first (and eighth) day of the week. The first fruits are a pledge of the future, a promise of what is to come. As Christ rose from the dead in the Springtime of the world, He will come again at the time of harvest. As He rose from the dead never to die again, so also shall those who love God and look for His appearing rise again at His coming, and enter into His Easter life, His resurrected and eternal life, His immortality, never to die again. St. Paul in his Epistle to the Church in Rome, writes: “*Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.*”¹⁵

You see, “*when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*”¹⁶ Easter is history and future. It happened and will happen. The third day, the day after the Sabbath, was Christ’s Easter. The day when He comes again shall

cause I go to the Father.” In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

These words must be taken quite literally, for they were fulfilled literally.

For a brief while they did not see him, and then they saw him. We must hear in these words their blunt, literal, objective meaning. They are echoed in words we say every morning and evening: “*He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. The third day he rose again from the dead.*”

In my younger days I was among people who wanted to be very spiritual, and some who wanted to *appear* to be very spiritual. The words I have quoted above were treated all too mystically by some people. They wanted to interpret them in terms of spiritual or religious experience. I want to be careful not to rob anyone of the significance of real experience of that kind, nor of a spiritual sense in which these words describe it for them: “*A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father.*”

However, I recall the words of G. K. Chesterton writing about the Thirteenth Century, and the prevailing mysticism of that era. In his biographical sketch of St. Thomas Aquinas, Chesterton wrote: “When Religion would have maddened men, theology kept them sane.”⁵ So, these words of Jesus, “*A little while, and ye shall not see me; and again, a little, and ye shall see me,*” must be treated first and foremost by the “Queen of the Sciences”—by which I do mean theology. It is a science, based on facts, facts that amount to revelation. And, if I may intrude upon the religious nature of a church service with the science of theology, let me encourage everyone here to examine the facts.

The scientific approach

Within a few days after the Lord spoke these words, the Apostles' situation was this: Their Lord was dead. Several times He told them how it would be. He said several times that He would be handed over to the Gentiles and be crucified, and die; and that He would rise again the third day. But their minds blocked out what He told them until they went through the worst of it. That is understandable. Their hope was shattered. They mourned and wept while the world rejoiced.

But, after three days, He appeared to them alive again. He had not conquered Rome; He had, instead, conquered the *real* enemy. He had overcome sin and death. He had been the Suffering Servant spoken of by Isaiah the prophet; now He was the man who died as “*an offering for sin*,”⁶ and then rose again to “*prolong His days*”⁷ as the one in whose hand the will of the Lord would prevail (all just as the prophet had said).

Those are the facts, as witnessed by His disciples. That is theology as science, based on facts of Revelation. And, indeed, Jesus encouraged the scientific approach, as St. Luke records: “*Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.*”⁸ And, as St. John reports: “*Then saith he to Thomas, ‘reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.’ And Thomas answered and said unto him, ‘My Lord and my God.’*”⁹

The Lord encouraged faith too; but He also made known His will that they should accept the proofs He showed them, that He was alive. As I said on Easter, this was not about some mystery called “the empty tomb.” It was about the facts declared by eyewitnesses; and not just any eyewitnesses, but those witnesses who gave the word *martyr* (witness) its new meaning. They stared down death as the only people in the world who

could now laugh at the terror of the grave—or, rather, the former terror; for they feared death no longer.

The other thing we may be moved to do with these words of Jesus is to apply them to our own emotional ups and downs, or to our own fears and the comforts that come by God's grace in this life. That is fair enough, as long as we see all that as a mere shadow of their true meaning. And, when we consider the implications of the resurrection of Christ for us, the literal meaning of His words is far greater for us.

Because He rose again from the dead the third day, your hope is not in this world only, but in the world to come when God makes everything new. St. Paul wrote to the Church in Rome, “*But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.*”¹⁰

We do not believe merely in a symbolic resurrection, something to help us feel good about worldly things, about transient emotional turmoil or desires. Our hope is not about this world that passes away, or the things of this world that so easily draw away our love from God to carnal affections. Besides, it is not always the will of God to deliver us from our perceived problems or to give us what we think we want for ourselves. Frankly, some of our desires are petty, some are sinful and selfish, and some are simply irrelevant to the things that God would have us pay attention to.

Easter past and future

Easter is a fact of history, and therefore also is our Lord's Ascension. But they are also the sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to come. The Resurrection is a fact that was accomplished on the Third Day, and a promise that will be fulfilled on the Last Day. “*Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh*