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

³ *Ecclesiasticus* 4:29—6:1 (KJV).

⁴ St. Matthew 16:13-end (KJV).

⁵ *I.e.*, Elijah.

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER
The Twenty-Second Sunday after Trinity¹
(Year I)

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-ninth Verse of the fourth Chapter of the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus.³

“... Be not hasty in thy tongue, and in thy deeds slack and remiss. Be not as a lion in thy house, nor frantick among thy servants. Let not thine hand be stretched out to receive, and shut when thou shouldest repay.

“Set thy heart upon thy goods; and say not, I have enough for my life. Follow not thine own mind and thy strength, to walk in the ways of thy heart: And say not, Who shall controul me for my works? for the Lord will surely revenge thy pride. Say not, I have sinned, and what harm hath happened unto me? for the Lord is longsuffering, he will in no wise let thee go. Concerning propitiation, be not without fear to add sin unto sin: And say not His mercy is great; he will be pacified for the multitude of my sins: for mercy and wrath come from him, and his indignation resteth upon sinners. Make no tarrying to turn to the Lord, and put not off from day to day: for suddenly shall the wrath of the Lord come forth, and in thy security thou shalt be destroyed, and perish in the day of vengeance. Set not thine heart upon goods unjustly gotten, for they shall not profit thee in the day of calamity. Winnow not with every wind, and go not into every way: for so doth the sinner that hath a double tongue. Be stedfast in thy understanding; and let thy word be the same. Be swift to hear; and let thy life be sincere; and with patience give answer. If thou hast understanding, answer thy neighbour; if not, lay thy hand upon thy mouth. Honour and shame is in talk: and the tongue of man is his fall. Be not called a whisperer, and lie not in wait with thy tongue: for a foul shame is upon the thief, and an evil condemnation

upon the double tongue. Be not ignorant of any thing in a great matter or a small.

“Instead of a friend become not an enemy; for [thereby] thou shalt inherit an ill name, shame, and reproach: even so shall a sinner that hath a double tongue.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

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

“[13] When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi [*sess-uh-REE-uh FILL-ih-pie*], he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias;⁵ and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith [**SETH**] unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona [*barr-JOE-nuh*]: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.

“From that time forth began Jesus to shew [**SHOW**] unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

I believe these Keys to the Kingdom consist quite simply of the Gospel of the crucified and risen Savior. That is what Jesus commits to the Rock.

But what I really want to say to you today is what Isaiah said to the Jews of his time: “Look to the rock from which *you* were hewn and the quarry from which *you* were dug.” Because you, with St. Peter, confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God, you are cut from that same rock.

Abraham and Sarah were only two, but God made their descendants more numerous than the grains of sand on the beach. The remnant of Israel returning from exile were few, but look what God did with them.

Peter was only one. The Apostles were only twelve. But Jesus promised to build them into a Church that cannot be overcome by the powers of evil and death.

What I want to remember when you leave here today is not only the glory of the past, but the promises of God for the future. Remember that those promises do not depend on flesh and blood. They depend upon God, the rock that cannot be destroyed. And all of you who, with St. Peter, confess Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of the loving God, you are cut from that same rock.

Amen.

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August 21, 2005

St. Thomas Episcopal Church
Orange, Virginia

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for the Eucharist on the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, according to the Revised Three-Year Common Lectionary, 2005.

my favorite people. But even people I don't like sometimes say things I do like. Here is something that he once said:

“Those who care intensely for God's purposes are in every age a relatively small minority. Their fewness discourages them. But it has been God's way to initiate vast movements by laying his cause in the consciences of a tiny company, and in time mightily multiplying them.

“We dare not despise the day of small things. The genuinely vital church in our time appears a diminutive minority in the population of most Christian nations. It is usually suffering from an inferiority complex. Let it look to the rock from whence it was hewn—the little circle of his disciples to whom the Lord did not hesitate to entrust a mission to the world.”

As a Protestant, Coffin did not have the nerve to say what Jesus really entrusted to them, and to us who follow them. He actually gave them, and us who follow them, the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Now before I go on, I guess I have to say something about how I understand that metaphor. That's a sermon in itself, but here I will simply refer to the image in St. John's Gospel about Jesus as the door through which people pass from the kingdom of this world to the kingdom of God. The preaching of the Gospel, as St. Paul says, unlocks that door, and St. Peter was the first to use those keys to open the church to Gentiles with his Pentecost sermon and his meeting with Cornelius in the book of Acts.

I also refer to the episode on the Emmaus [ee-MAY-uss] Road on Easter, when the risen Christ Himself “opened the Scriptures” to Cleopas [KLEE-oh-puss] and his companion (probably his wife). Once again, the Gospel is the key that unlocks the Old Testament.

“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

In a time when the outlook for God's people was somewhat grim, a prophet named Isaiah encouraged the people to remember who they were and what they were made of. “Look to the rock from which you were hewn,” he said, “and the quarry from which you were dug.” The rock to which the prophet refers is God. Isaiah is reminding the people that they are of divine origin.

In the Bible, the word “rock” appears over two hundred times. It is sometimes used to refer to actual geological rocks, but many times it is used symbolically as a metaphor for God, the Rock of Ages. It is never used symbolically in any other way.

In the New Testament, St. Paul speaks of Jesus as the rock, and when Jesus Himself, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, talks about building a house upon a rock, He is saying that whoever follows His teachings is building his life on the foundation of God Himself.

You will recall that the Ten Commandments were carved in stone. Do you think that is a coincidence? In the

Second Lesson today, one of the disciples grasps for the first time the true identity of Jesus: “You are the Christ,” he says, “the Son of the Living God.” And Jesus says, “Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, because flesh and blood has not revealed it to you, but my Father in heaven.” In other words, it is not your own human nature that enables you to see who I really am. It is God who enables you to see that, and you have just shown that you are of God by confessing that I am the Messiah.

Jesus goes on to give Simon a new name. He calls him “Peter”, from the Greek word for rock. The Aramaic equivalent is “Cephas” [SEE-fuss]. This new name reflects the new identity and the new status of the disciple. He has been born of God, rock from rock.

In St. John’s Gospel, Jesus says, “That which is born of the Spirit is Spirit.” Here he is saying, “That which is born of rock is rock.” In both cases, what He means is that whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God is himself born of God and reflects the divine nature in himself.

Jesus then goes on to say, “On this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it.” Peter is the first of the God-filled men that Jesus intends to mold into a new community of faith, which, for the first time, he calls “my church”. That community will prove to be as indestructible as God Himself, because God Himself is present in the people who comprise the Church.

Sometimes the Church appears to be anything but indestructible and yet it has survived terrible persecutions, horrible scandals, enormous mistakes and heresies, bitter divisions and schisms, incompetent and hypocritical leadership, and a lack of serious commitment on the part of the great majority of its members. What other organization or institution could survive all that?

I am reminded of the words of that great hymn “The Church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord.” The third stanza begins, “Though with a scornful wonder men see her sore oppressed, by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed.” The church survives because it depends on the strength of God and not on the strength of its human components.

We see today how little the world respects us and how helpless we are to influence what is happening around us. We are not unlike the community of faith to whom Isaiah wrote the words, “Look to the rock from which you were hewn”.

These were the people who dared to return to the ruins of Jerusalem after their country had been conquered, their temple destroyed, and their people removed to a foreign land. These people who returned in hope of rebuilding their city were few in number, lacking in worldly resources, and surrounded by a hostile social climate. Like us, they remembered the glories of the past and were dismayed by the bleakness of the present.

It is in that context that we need to hear Isaiah’s words. “Look to the rock from which you were hewn and the quarry from which you were dug.” “You are the people of God,” says the prophet. “You are not dependent on your own resources.”

Isaiah then goes on to remind the people that there was a time when the community of faith consisted of only two people: Abraham and Sarah, an old man and an old woman. From such unlikely material, God promised to make a great nation, and God always delivers on his promises—the people remembered the glory of the past. Now they were asked to remember the origin of their greatness: “Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for when he was but one I called him, and I blessed him and made him many.”

The Reverend Henry Sloane Coffin, former president of Union Theological Seminary in New York City, is not one of