

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

Whitsunday¹
(Years I & II)

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw²

Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-eighth Verse of the second Chapter of Joel.⁴

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. And I will shew **[SHOW]** wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the eighth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Romans.⁵

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh;

but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 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. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “*As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*” In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Homily:

Every church, of course thinks it is the true church and that it is led by the Spirit of God and that its members are the children of God. The Lutherans think so. The Episcopalians think so. The Roman Catholics think so. The Presbyterians, the Baptists, everybody thinks so, and we think so too.

When The Roman Catholic Church proclaimed the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Bodily Assumption of Mary, it assured us all that the Holy Spirit had led to those conclusions. When The Episcopal Church decided to ordain women and rewrite the Prayer Book and approve of same sex marriages, it declared in every instance that it was being led by the Spirit of God.

When The Church of England separated from The Church of Rome, it was the Holy Spirit Who again took the blame. And when the people who established our own little Anglican body, independent of both Canterbury and The Episcopal Church, well, of course they claimed that the Spirit of God was leading them.

The Pentecostals seem to think that they have lock on the Holy Spirit, and they offer their enthusiastic worship and occasional speaking in tongues as evidence.

So here we are confronted with a myriad of churches and ecclesiastical structures, all claiming the leadership of the Holy Spirit and all claiming to be the true Church. Obviously we cannot all be right, and just as obviously, since the Holy Spirit is the spirit of unity, we might easily question whether any of us can legitimately claim His leadership.

So what are we to do, and how do we find and identify the true Church? Jesus gives us the answer in the seventh chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, which is a message to warn us to beware of false prophets: "*Ye shall know them by their fruits.*"

"Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.... Wherefor by their fruits ye shall know them. Not everyone that saith unto me 'Lord, Lord', shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."

We all understand that, don't we? We deal with politicians that way all the time. They make speeches and proclamations and statements and we don't really pay much attention. What matters is not what they say but what they do. We look at their voting records, their past accomplishments, the way they live their lives away from the cameras and the microphones, and that's how we make our judgments about public servants. And so it is with churches: "*Ye shall know them by their fruits.*"

But what are the fruits that we are to look for? What are the characteristics of a church that is really being led by Spirit of God? Well, here we can get some help from the Apostle Paul.

In his Epistle to the Galatians, St. Paul gives a list. It includes "*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance.*" He also gives a list of evil fruits, which, of course, are not of the Holy Spirit. That list includes things like adultery, sexual debauchery, idolatry, occult practices, anger, strife, heresy, jealousy, drunkenness, and orgies. Wherever you see those things, says the Apostle, you are witnessing the leadership of the world and not the leadership of the Holy Spirit

So it's really a very simple matter. We all know love and kindness and goodness when we see them. We all know anger and jealousy and debauchery when we see them. Those are the things we need to look for when we are seeking the true Church.

Our behaviors are rooted in our beliefs, and it is also true that morality develops out of doctrine. So we do need to learn the teachings of any church with which we decide to affiliate. But we don't need to study doctrine in order to recognize the true Church when we see it. We simply need to look at the behaviors and attitudes of its leaders and its people.

That's what visitors do when they consider joining a church. That's what the candidates for the rectorship of a congregation do as well. So I conclude with the obvious question. When people look at this church, what kind of behaviors and attitudes do they see? Do they see the fruit of the Spirit of God, or the fruit of some other spirit? What kind of tree is this congregation?

Please don't tell me. Just show me.

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St. Alban's Anglican Catholic Church
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¹ This sermon was originally written on the Epistle for Holy Communion on the Eighth Sunday after Trinity, 2008.

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³ *The Table of Lessons*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxx (Anglican Church of Canada 1962).

⁴ Joel 2:28-end (KJV).

⁵ Romans 8:1-17 (KJV).