

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity²

Lessons:³

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

“Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things. Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig tree and the vine do yield their strength. Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you. And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed. And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-fourth Verse of the sixth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.⁵

“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than rai-

ment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

Today’s Second Lesson warns us against the deception of the cares of this world. And this is summed up perfectly by our Lord when He tells us to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. In that seeking we are not escaping reality, rather we are facing it in its fullest. We can face good news and bad, even the fact of our own mortality, with a brand of courage unknown except by faith.

Saint Paul, in his Epistle to the churches in Galatia, adds to this warning one against the deception of false religion. He saw the need to correct the heresy of self-appointed teachers who proclaimed a new and different “gospel”:

“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which

⁶ Galatians 1:6-9.

⁷ Jude 3.

⁸ Isaiah 26:3-4.

⁹ James 5:11.

¹⁰ Rector, St. Benedict’s Anglican Catholic Church, Chapel Hill, NC.

“Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.” Everything you need for this life will be added. You have no cause for anxiety as unbelievers do. But more than that, more than food and drink, clothing and a place to lay your head, in the Lord is everlasting strength, the gift of sharing immortality with the Risen Christ, and the hope of partaking of the Divine nature through grace. You need not fear that the one who died to take away your sins, and who has promised in His resurrection to be with us forever, will change His mind and break His promises. What you need in this life will be provided as you seek first His kingdom and righteousness. But, even more so, “*in the Lord is everlasting strength.*” The pledge is eternal life through the risen Christ who has overcome death.

This is the faith that takes you through a life of real struggles and temptations. To feed and strengthen this faith you need to know what to rest your hope upon. For that you need the teaching that God has given by the revelation of His word. Dare I say it? You need the stable anchor of true theology and sound doctrine, because His word revealed in Scripture and known to His Church is where you discover the truth of God’s love.

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The Rev’d Robert Hart¹⁰
September 26, 2012

¹ “Any set of Psalms and Lessons appointed for the evening of any day may be read at the morning service, and any set of morning Psalms and Lessons may be read in the evening.” *Concerning the Service of the Church*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity, 2012.

³ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁴ Joel 2:21-27 (KJV).

⁵ St. Matthew 6:24-end (KJV).

is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.”⁶

These words may sound harsh to people who imagine that all religion is good: But every genuine pastor, every sincere bishop, priest, or deacon, must teach faithfully what has been revealed and handed down. We cannot simply smile and accept what is taught in cults, or even in churches that are turning away from a clear and faithful adherence to “*the faith once delivered to the saints*”.⁷

The heresy in Galatia that St. Paul addressed was a new teaching that all of the Gentiles who had converted to Christ could not be saved unless they were circumcised and kept the Six Hundred and Thirteen Commandments of the Torah, and then only as interpreted by their approved Rabbis. Today we have false teaching of every sort all around us, and it has terrible consequences spiritually, and sometimes physically.

For example, the Jehovah’s Witnesses not only teach the Arian and Pneumatimachian [***new-mat-ih-MACK-ee-un***] heresies by denying the Trinity, by denying the existence of the Holy Spirit, and denying the bodily Resurrection of Christ (who, you will recall, actually appeared to witnesses). These self-proclaimed “Witnesses” (capital “W”) also cause their people to die, and at times have caused the deaths of their own children, because they forbid something as good and practical as blood transfusions. It is tragic.

For many years my father worked side by side with a good friend, a man we all liked very much, who died at the age of sixty from heart disease. A very simple medicine could have kept him alive to this day but he was a member of Mary Baker Eddy’s so-called “Christian Science Church,” (three misno-

mers) and so he would not take medicine. As a result of his beliefs he died before he could retire, before he could meet his grandchildren. The picture we are given of God, by these kinds of doctrines, is one of a very unreasonable and harsh taskmaster who demands the impossible without providing grace.

To avoid false gospels we need sound doctrine, and true theology.

In the Gospel Jesus lifts our eyes heavenward. The American BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER of 1928 does something unusual when it prints this passage from St. Matthew among the Eucharistic propers. There, it does not use the exact words of the King James Bible, “*give no thought for the morrow.*” Instead, this one passage uses the 1888 Revised Version: “*Be not anxious for the morrow.*” Anxiety can take your mind off of the Lord; it can disturb your peace and ruin your whole life. Anxiety is the opposite of faith. Isaiah the prophet tells us:

*“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD, the LORD, is everlasting strength.”*⁸

This strength is real and effective for us here and now in this life, and it is the only strength that lasts forever. No matter what evils come in this life, as people face the death of loved ones, as they face betrayal, economic hardship, illness, their own mortality and the hostility of an unbelieving world, *in the Lord* is everlasting strength.

“*Ye have heard of the patience of Job,*” we are told.⁹ Let us look as well to the suffering of the Apostles. One of the most moving passages in all of Saint Paul’s Epistles, at least for me, is a personal plea that he wrote near the end of his life to his son in the Faith, Timothy. It is not a deeply theological passage, at least not in an academic sense. It is not a passage that we can use to illuminate our minds with doctrine—and yet is a

very useful passage for theology and doctrine if you reflect upon it. In the last chapter of Second Timothy we find two requests. First he wrote: “*The cloak that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments.*” Then he wrote, “*Do thy diligence to come before winter.*”

Think about that. When the Romans locked up a prisoner they did not feed him, or tend to his needs. That had to be arranged by family and friends. At the end of his many years of service, which he once described as involving constant persecutions, and other troubles such as shipwrecks, hunger and cold, he had come to this.

The Saint, the former Rabbi who was the father of the Gentile Christians, the man who wrote about charity in words more meaningful than any other passage ever written about love, the man who gave us most of the words of the New Testament, bearing in his body the marks of Christ, glorying only and ever in the cross of Christ, had instead of retirement and a nice pension, a cell in a dungeon and a sentence of death. He was going to face Nero's executioner. To get through his last Winter on this earth he asked Timothy to bring the cloak, and to hurry up and get it to him before the cold winds of Winter could blow through his cell.

Well, that may not seem like a very deep theological passage. But it is. We see the faith of this saint who looked above the things of this world, this last witness of Christ’s Resurrection facing death without fear, suffering the loss of all things with joy. His needs were real. He needed the cloak. Also, he wanted his books, probably hand-written copies of the Old Testament scriptures. What good were “*the books, especially the parchments,*” to a man on death row? The answer is, he wanted to keep his mind fed with the word of God, because he knew, living in prison and facing death, that the truth of the word of God was his anchor.