

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
The First Sunday after Trinity²

Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the seventeenth Verse of the twenty-first Chapter of the Book of Job.⁴

“... How oft is the candle of the wicked put out! and how oft cometh their destruction upon them! God distributeth sorrows in his anger. They are as stubble before the wind, and as chaff that the storm carrieth away. God layeth up his iniquity for his children: he rewardeth him, and he shall know it. His eyes shall see his destruction, and he shall drink of the wrath of the Almighty. For what pleasure hath he in his house after him, when the number of his months is cut off in the midst? Shall any teach God knowledge? seeing he judgeth those that are high. One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet. His breasts are full of milk, and his bones are moistened with marrow. And another dieth in the bitterness of his soul, and never eateth with pleasure. They shall lie down alike in the dust, and the worms shall cover them. Behold, I know your thoughts, and the devices which ye wrongfully imagine against me. For ye say, Where is the house of the prince? and where are the dwelling places of the wicked? Have ye not asked them that go by the way? and do ye not know their tokens, That the wicked is reserved to the day of destruction? they shall be brought forth to the day of wrath. Who shall declare his way to his face? and who shall repay him what he hath done? Yet shall he be brought to the grave, and shall remain in the tomb. The clods of the valley shall be sweet unto him, and every man shall draw after him, as there are innumerable before him.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the nineteenth Verse of the sixteenth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke.⁵

“There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father’s house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith [SETH] unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “*If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead.*”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

Love is the theme of this First Sunday after Trinity; and that love is the love of God. It is best expressed in English with the word “charity,” and even in that we find some confusion. For the kind of charity that St. John writes about, and that was lacking in the Rich Man, is not that kind that merely throws a little money at something to ease the conscience, or, worse, to impress people. The Rich Man sent food out to the beggar, Lazarus, namely crumbs that fell from his table. But he failed completely by God’s standard to love his neighbor.

The love of which these passages of Scripture speak is personal. And it begins not with us, but with God. It begins by having your eyes opened to what God has done for you, and then only in light of your realizing how undeserving you are. You can defend yourself and plead your case; you can try to justify every sin you ever committed. That is how the Rich Man lived his life.

The ending of this parable was meant to shock us into reality. This is the only parable Jesus told that He did not compose Himself, except, that is, for the ending. It has been discovered that this was a well-known story among the Jewish people of that time, and the story always ended with Abraham saying, “*And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.*” But Jesus added His own ending:

“Then [the Rich Man] said, ‘I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send [Lazarus] to my father’s house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ Abraham saith unto him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, ‘Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the

dead, they will repent.’ And he said unto him, ‘If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.’”

Indeed, like the Rich Man and his brothers, you can spend your life trying to convince yourself that you have God’s complete approval, and no need of forgiveness. Perhaps you may construct your own system of good and bad, compare yourself to people who are infinitely worse, and so feel that you are righteous enough not to need God’s mercy. But if reality hits you, and if the truth shall make *you* free, it begins by asking if your own standard may not be true enough to take you safely into eternity. Has God spoken? Should you not hear?

In Moses and the Prophets, we find a moral law that is eternal and unchanging, those Ten Commandments and all that they really mean (which we learn in the Sermon on the Mount). We also see in Moses and the Prophets the great Messianic themes of salvation from sin and death. To prepare for eternity, we have been given quite a lot to hear. We have been given *Law and Gospel*. “*Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.*”⁷

Once you see your own need, you can appreciate the love of God. We see that salvation from sin and death was not our idea, but God’s own will. Redemption is His initiative, without any suggestion from us: “*Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.... We love him, because he first loved us.*”⁸ That love was not merely some nice and inspiring bit of sweetness and sentimentality. God saw that our need involved everything that is meant by that word “propitiation.”

It involved the pain and suffering that was born by Jesus in the death of the Cross. And even so, if you don’t hear the great moral themes and the great Messianic themes of redemption, that is, if you don’t hear Moses and the prophets, Christ’s

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 Epistle and Gospel for Holy Communion on the First Sunday after Trinity, 2012.

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

⁴ Job 21:17-33 (KJV).

⁵ St. Luke 16:19-end (KJV).

⁶ St. Luke 16:31 (RSV).

⁷ Galatians 3:24 (KJV).

⁸ I John 4:10, 19 (KJV).

⁹ Proverbs 12:10 (KJV).

¹⁰ St. Matthew 25:31-46 (RSV).

the least of these, you did it not to me.’ And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”¹⁰

How often has this been quoted, “*the least of these my brethren?*” Look again, and see what it really says: “*ONE OF the least of these my brethren.*” “*One of...*”, those are the missing words when this is misquoted, as it usually is. That *one* is your neighbor, that *one* is your Lazarus, with his unpleasant and unsightly sores.

The Bible *always* personalizes it: “*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*” Thy neighbor, not mankind. “*He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen...*” His brother, not some impersonal thing called mankind. The Rich Man gave at the office, so to speak; he sent out those crumbs from his table to the beggar. But if he had known God’s love, if he had heard Moses and the Prophets, the great moral truth and the themes of redemption revealed to the children of men, if he had loved God because God first loved us, he would have brought in his brother Lazarus from the streets, and sat him at his own table.

That is the love of God when it is reflected in your heart. How can you know that love? You may begin right now, by letting God quicken your conscience, and cleanse it, all the while showing His love for as you contemplate the Cross where Jesus poured out His soul unto death for you. It is personal; the gift was given to you there. His words of forgiveness from the Cross are for you. His “*It is finished*” was the full payment and cancelation of your entire debt. You can love God because, as we see on the Cross where Jesus died, He first loved you. And therefore, you can love your brother, your neighbor, your own Lazarus.

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The Rev’d Robert Hart
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own resurrection, with over five-hundred eyewitnesses, will never persuade you to repent. You need a soft heart that listens and hears. Then the Gospel, the Good News that He first loved us, can enter your mind and heart.

You see, on this First Sunday after Trinity, Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Easter and Pentecost have all come, and we are now in the Church that became so powerful in the Book of Acts because the Holy Spirit has come to us with His gifts and power. Now we turn to the second table of the Law. That first table has four Commandments that tell us to love God. But we cannot love God, that is, we cannot love God unless and until we know that He first loved us. We find that love nailed to the Cross. There He is broken, bleeding and pouring out His soul for your sins and mine.

We are forgiven without losing sight of God’s holiness, and without mistaking that forgiveness for some idea that God didn’t really care. Forgiveness is not approval. It was costly. The ninth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that redemption perfects and cleanses the human conscience. Indeed, a true understanding of the Cross of Christ gives life to your conscience. God loved you, and this is what it cost. Sin does matter, because God is holy. And sin is forgiven, because God is love. But it did not come without the death of the cross.

So, this Sunday, we see that to obey the first four Commandments, which are summarized by the First and Great Commandment to love God (“*with all thy heart, all thy soul and all thy mind*”), is only possible as a response; “*We love Him because He first loved us.*” And now, in the Epistle and Gospel readings for today—and that Gospel is our Second Lesson here—after celebrating from Advent until today the great acts of God’s love in Jesus His Son that move us to love Him, we turn to the second table of the Law, the six Commandments that are summarized in the words, “*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*”

At the beginning it is personal. *“Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another....”* And so it goes on: *“We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar: for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loves God love his brother also.”*

I am reminded always of the singular words in Commandments to love. I am going to quote an earlier sermon of my own for this same Sunday:

“The righteous man considers the life of his beast. But, the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel’ says the Book of Proverbs.⁹ Utopian ideologues since the French Revolution, such as Karl Marx and his followers, spoke lofty words about what was best for mankind. It reminds me of one of Charles Schultz’s *Peanuts* cartoons. Linus tells his sister Lucy that he wants to be a doctor, a *great* doctor. She tells him, ‘You cannot be a great doctor. You know why? Because a doctor must love mankind. You don’t love mankind.’ Linus, stunned, retorts ‘I do love mankind.... It’s *people* I can’t stand!’ The ideologues have always loved *mankind*; and they have made many *people* suffer for it. They have offered millions of innocent victims to some idea of “good for the highest number” and Satanic propaganda about what is best for humanity. Crowds enjoying the spectacle of heads being cut off in Paris, Communists dictating who should live, who should die, and who must go to the camps, and, indeed, the Nazis destroying millions in order to advance human evolution to the state of perfection, all believed they were lovers of mankind, saviors of that abstract and impersonal thing called ‘humanity.’”

Hear this from the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew:

“When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of