

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
The Second Sunday after Trinity²

Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the third Chapter of the First Book of Samuel, otherwise called the First Book of the Kings.⁴

“And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision. And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see; And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep; That the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I. And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down. And the LORD called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And he answered, I called not, my son; lie down again. Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him. And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child. Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place. And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.

“And the LORD said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I

have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.

“And Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel feared to shew **[SHOW]** Eli the vision. Then Eli called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son. And he answered, Here am I. And he said, What is the thing that the LORD hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee. And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him. And he said, It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the forty-fourth Verse of the seventh Chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.⁵

“... Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen. Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David; Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built him an house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith **[SETH]** the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith **[SETH]** the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?

“Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed **[SHOWD]** before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

⁴ I Samuel 3:1-18 (KJV).

⁵ Acts 7:44—8:4 (KJV).

⁶ II Chron. 24:20-22 (KJV).

⁷ Acts 7:57-60 (KJV).

⁸ The German word meaning for “joy taken in [others’] injuries”.

⁹ Rector, St. Benedict’s Anglican Catholic Church, Chapel Hill, NC.

“When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

“And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

In the Old Testament Chronicles, a prophet named Zechariah (not to be confused with the later prophet of the same name), suffered this fate:

“And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada [dgeh-HOY-uh-duh] the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith [SETH] God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the LORD, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the LORD, he hath also forsaken you. And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the

house of the LORD. Thus Joash [JOE-ash] the king remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada [dgeh-HOY-uh-duh] his father had done to him, but slew his son. And when he died, he said, The LORD look upon it, and require it.”⁶

However, in the Book of Acts, we read of the same fate being suffered centuries later by the first Christian Martyr, Saint Stephen. Notice the difference.

“Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed [SHOWD] before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it. When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”⁷

Saint Stephen had an advantage that Zechariah, centuries before, did not have. We do not criticize Zechariah for demanding justice when he died, because, unlike Saint Stephen, he could not look back to Jesus Christ on the Cross.

We all know the words from the Gospel of Luke, words spoken by Jesus as He was hanging upon the Cross: “Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

The Word made Flesh, God the Son in His human nature, showed us what mercy truly is. We already knew that God, from heaven, forgives sins. God cannot be harmed, wronged or deprived of anything.

Yet, as a Man, it is God who was mocked, beaten and crucified by sinful men, and who pronounced forgiveness. No angel can preach on this subject as well as you and I can, for it takes human frailty to speak of forgiving those who can cause us to suffer.

So we do not criticize the holy prophet, Zechariah, of the Old Testament. Instead, we see that Saint Stephen had even more grace, for he could look back to God the Son, in His human nature, forgiving the very men who were murdering Him, who were enjoying the spectacle of His suffering, as they displayed the depths of *Schadenfreude*⁸ [SHAH-denn-froy-duh]. Saint Stephen could recall God in the flesh forgiving genuine pains that were inflicted upon His Person.

May our Lord Jesus, grant to us the joy that comes when we are free to love everyone, including those who have wronged us, with that charity placed within us by the Holy Ghost that that can, if we acquire it, make us perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect. Amen

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The Rev’d Robert Hart⁹
December 26, 2011

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 xxvii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² This sermon was originally written on the Lesson for the Epistle at Mass on the Feast of St. Stephen, 2011.

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