

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
The Fourth Sunday in Lent¹

Lessons:

The First Lesson:² Here beginneth the twenty-first Verse of the thirty-ninth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel.³

“... And I will set my glory among the heathen, and all the heathen shall see my judgment that I have executed, and my hand that I have laid upon them. So the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God from that day and forward.

“And the heathen shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity: because they trespassed against me, therefore hid I my face from them, and gave them into the hand of their enemies: so fell they all by the sword. According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions have I done unto them, and hid my face from them. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel, and will be jealous for my holy name; After that they have borne their shame, and all their trespasses whereby they have trespassed against me, when they dwelt safely in their land, and none made them afraid. When I have brought them again from the people, and gathered them out of their enemies' lands, and am sanctified in them in the sight of many nations; Then shall they know that I am the LORD their God, which caused them to be led into captivity among the heathen: but I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there. Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson:⁴ Here beginneth the sixth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John.⁵

³ Ezekiel 39:21-end (KJV).

⁴ “Upon any Sunday or Holy Day, the Minister may read the Epistle or the Gospel of the Day in place of the Second Lesson at Morning or Evening Prayer.” *Concerning the Service of the Church*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁵ St. John 6:1-14 (KJV).

⁶ St. John 6:5 (KJV).

⁷ Galatians 4:25-26.

⁸ Exodus 14:13.

⁹ Bishop Ordinary, the Diocese of the Holy Cross; Rector, the Cathedral Church of the Epiphany, Columbia, SC.

“Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias. And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased. And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples. And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh.

“When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith [SETH] unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, saith [SETH] unto him, There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many? And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would. When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten. Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

HOLY TO THE LORD inscribed on them, and so would the tools on your workbench, your computer, lawnmower, car, house, desk, all say HOLY TO THE LORD. On some 18-wheeler trucks there is a decal on the hood or door that says: Operator: John Doe. Owner: Almighty God.

Jesus’ Provision for the multitudes in the wilderness prefigures the Last Supper, the Cross and the Resurrection. He does in the wilderness what He would do at the Last Supper, taking, blessing, breaking and giving. What He does in the wilderness He fulfills on the Cross, His Body broken and lifted up for all to see. What He does in the wilderness He vindicates in the Resurrection, when the Holy Spirit raises Him from the dead, to make all things new, the New Head, the New Adam of the New Human Race in the New Creation, in glory no one could have dreamed of.

Jesus’ Resurrection is the event that defines everything. When John wrote the Gospel that bears his name, he was writing it in the light of the Resurrection. From the Pentecost onwards the Apostles, and we, see everything in the light of Jesus’ Resurrection, the impossible possibility. If you want to rise from hopeless situations, discouragement, anxiety, bitterness or guilt, put your hand in His, receive His Body and Blood, and let Him show you what He showed Philip and the other Apostles in the wilderness. No matter what the circumstances you can proclaim the three words that are transfiguring the universe: Christ is risen!

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The Rt. Rev’d Paul C. Hewett, SSC⁹
March 18, 2012

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel at Mass on the Fourth Sunday in Lent, 2012.

² *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xviii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

into the Dead Sea, it will cleanse and freshen the whole Dead Sea, and make it alive again. In the New Covenant, this Sanctuary, these 4,000 square feet are a holy place to spread God's holiness all through these neighborhoods and beyond. Your body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit, that others might experience the living God and be saved.

In our wilderness times and dark nights God breaks us, cleanses us and anoints us. We begin to will only what He wills. We experience more of His life, His love, His power. We see the purposes of the Cross more clearly. We are less concerned about our own wishes, needs and mindset. We are delivered more from self pity and self righteousness. Our overwhelming desire is more and more for Him, to learn more about His grace and His ways. Scriptures come alive as they never have before. We have deeper compassion for others who are suffering. There is more of the peace which passes all understanding.

In the wilderness with the Apostles and the crowd Jesus shows the most unlikely way Jesus wants the Apostles to experience the feeding of the crowd, having that bread and fish multiply out. He wants us to know that we will do greater things than He did, because He goes to the Father and sends us the Holy Spirit.

Twelve baskets of food are left over, an impossible possibility, foreshadowing the Resurrection.

Here at this Altar, whenever a priest is available, we do what Jesus did on the hillside in the wilderness. We take of all that is in our lives, symbolized by the bread and wine, and bless it, and break it before God, and give it out. When we return creation to the Father, through the Son, it comes back to us in the Holy Spirit, transfigured and multiplied out and a means of communion with God and one another. It comes back to us HOLY TO THE LORD. Zechariah the prophet said that in the new creation even the pots and pans and trash cans would have

Homily:

Today is Mother's Day in Great Britain because of the reference at Mass in the Epistle to Jerusalem,⁷ our Mother above. It is also known as Refreshment Sunday because of the feeding of the multitudes in today's Gospel, that is our Second Lesson. In times gone by, English youngsters who boarded at school went home for this weekend to get some decent cooking. So the theme of Mothering Sunday evolved, with reference to our own mothers, our Mother, the Church, and our Mother, Mary.

"Make the men sit down." Relax. It's intermission time in Lent. Satisfy your hunger and thirst. Lent is just about half over, and it's time for a break. The theme today is Jesus, the Refreshment of Souls, the Bread of Life, offered to us in the Eucharist, by our holy Mother, the Church.

The crowds in today's Gospel were following Jesus on His way to Jerusalem to keep Passover, after seeing some of his miracles. The feeding of the five thousand takes place against the background of the impending Passover. This is no coincidence in John's Gospel.

The crowds were united in the weariness, hunger and thirst. They were faint from the length of the journey. Jesus understands their need. He understands the hurry of our world and our crowded schedules. He knows about overload and burn-out. He knows the weariness of our spiritual lives, the controversies of the day, the burden of sin, the frustration of our efforts to be free and our temptations to give up. He knows how easily we can content ourselves with mediocrity in things of the Spirit, and how easily we can settle for luke-warmness.

Jesus, the Refreshment of Souls, says, "Make the men sit down." He now engages Philip. He challenges him. He sets a humanly impossible task before him. There are some 20,000 people to feed, and Jesus throws Philip a one-hundred-mile-an-

hour curve ball. Jesus asks Philip, “Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” At this moment Philip wishes he were not an Apostle.

Philip and the Apostles have to let go of their own limited way of viewing the need of the hour; each believer has to let go of his own way of doing things, with his own limited vision and his own strength. We have to let go of frustration, disappointment, exasperation and anger.

These things quench the Holy Spirit: they are static on the radio, and we are to tune them out. God wants to use our circumstances, no matter how difficult, for his glory. Philip is about to get a foretaste of Jesus’ Resurrection.

The multitudes are in the wilderness with Jesus, where He has been teaching them. The wilderness is the place where God pulls out the props. We have to learn to depend on God. Our ego props are kicked away, the ways we derive our self esteem. God even deprives us of spiritual blessings in the wilderness. He will strip us of grounds for faith, hope and love. There will be no more reason for believing, hoping or loving. He is now breaking us, cleansing us and anointing us. Without deep breaking, cleansing and anointing, we are nothing but religious phonies! When we are slaves of Jesus Christ we will be totally free. When we admit we are spiritually bankrupt we will own the world.

In the wilderness, Israel rebelled ten times. They vented their fault-finding with God and Moses.

But endless venting makes things worse. We nurse our grudges against God and each other, and quench the Holy Spirit. We are not to vent our angers or lusts or pride or greed or any other sin. Put them all at the foot of the Cross. Let Jesus be our sin for us, sin nailed to the Cross, to die with Him and be buried. Nail it to the Cross! Then the Holy Spirit can cut off our passions at the root, and throw the weeds into the fire. He

shows us there is a way through situations where we don’t see the way—because without Him there is no way. But He is the way that goes through the Cross and to the Resurrection.

In Exodus, the Egyptians are chasing the Israelites.⁸ The Israelites have their backs to the Red Sea! God says to Moses, Fear not! Stand still! Submit yourself to the confusion. Trust God anyway. Cease with your own understanding, your own striving. God acts at the eleventh hour, at the last minute, with the last bullet. The eleventh hour God teaches us real trust.

God teaches us in trials that He gives us trust when we cannot see or feel, when everything is falling apart. Never mind how you feel. Hang on to God and what He wants to do. The fire in a fireplace first blackens the logs. Then the logs become one with the fire. The Holy Spirit’s purpose for the fire is to break down hard substances—to destroy things that are useless—to reshape us—to make us more like Jesus—to give us more power—to experience the fellowship of His sufferings—to teach us how to help others.

Ezekiel wrote during the captivity in Babylon, five hundred years before Christ. God’s people were dry bones in a valley; their hopes were ruined and they were desolate. Ezekiel said not to get discouraged or defeated. God is powerfully at work, to replace us with Himself, to make us holy, to have intimacy with Him. After seventy years, Israel’s fortunes are restored. God sets His glory among the nations. His glory is going to spread out. In the Old Covenant, the motto is “touch God and die.” Man has to be protected from God’s holiness. God’s holiness has to be protected from man. Holiness is contaminated by what is profane or secular. When fresh water flows into the Dead Sea it becomes brackish.

But in the New Covenant, which Ezekiel foretold, the motto is “touch God and live.” What makes this possible is Jesus’ Sacrifice on the Cross. Now the Father’s holiness will sanctify the secular and the profane. When fresh water flows