

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
The Third Sunday after Trinity²

Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-third Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah.⁴

“Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith [SETH] the LORD. Therefore thus saith [SETH] the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith [SETH] the LORD. And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith [SETH] the LORD.

“Behold, the days come, saith [SETH] the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. Therefore, behold, the days come, saith [SETH] the LORD, that they shall no more say, The LORD liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, The LORD liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

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

“... And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus [**zah-KEY-uss**], which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus [**zah-KEY-uss**], make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. And Zacchaeus [**zah-KEY-uss**] stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Epistle of St. Paul to Timothy: “Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

A fire in a fireplace needs to be stirred and stoked every now and then, to keep it burning brightly. The earth is stirred by frost upheavals. During exercise, our blood is stirred up and our lungs aerated. The elliptical camshaft in an engine stirs up the valves for intake and exhaust.

in power. The Eucharist is the Sacrament of Joy. So we pray that our wills be stirred up.

Ahead of us lies the long Trinity season of reflection on the principles of our Faith. Let us consecrate our wills to Him anew. Let us dare to commit to His keeping our whole lives, stirred anew in the Holy Spirit with His power and peace.

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The Rt. Rev'd Paul C. Hewett, SSC⁷
November 25, 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 Propers for Holy Communion on the Sunday Next Before Advent, 2012.

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

⁴ Jeremiah 23:1-8 (KJV).

⁵ St. Luke 19:2-10 (KJV).

⁶ II Timothy 1:6 (KJV).

⁷ Bishop Ordinary, the Diocese of the Holy Cross; Rector, the Cathedral Church of the Epiphany, Columbia, SC.

way those elements should be reflected in our lives. So let us consecrate our wills anew to Him. Let us dare to commit to His keeping our whole lives, stirred anew with His power and peace, stirred with the vision of what the Eucharist is in our lives, the source and summit of our lives, the Sacrament of joy, our taste of eternal life as love and communion.

The gladness of our life in God is that our roots are in the future, and the branches in the present. We are stirred and nourished by heaven, by our risen Lord. Our time on this earth is a movement from the End. We celebrate the memory of our future, Jesus in glory, who summons us from ahead, from the End, the End which gives meaning to everything.

After the worst winters, sap stirs the branches to sprout buds of renewed life. Someone said recently that “the Church is being renewed, illumined, made humbler, stronger, more evangelical by its purification, in order that she may make resplendent for all the glorious reign of Jesus. Faithful disciples of Jesus, you are these buds, who are desirous of living a life of prayer and mortification, in charity, in union with God, while at the same time you are unknown to the world.”

What stirs us about the miracle of the loaves and the fishes is that bread, and fish, and all creation, are manifested in Christ as a participation in the new life of God’s Kingdom, the Kingdom which neither Zedekiah nor any earthly ruler could manifest, except by fits and starts. Only Jesus, the totally anointed one, can fully manifest the Kingdom of God. On the hillside, with the loaves and fishes in Jesus’ hands, we see righteousness erupting through all the cracks of our condition.

The great joy of our Faith, the complete and marvelous novelty of our Faith, is that the age to come is already in our midst. The Kingdom is at hand. It has appeared. Its light is already shining. It is already at work in the world. God is with us! The Holy Spirit has been poured out on all flesh! Christ is in our midst! The Kingdom of the Father has been manifested

The Collect for the Sunday next before Advent has given that last Sunday of the Church Year the nickname “Stir Up Sunday”:

“Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may by thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*”

That Collect is about the stirring up of our wills. In one of his Epistles, St. Paul wrote to Timothy:

“stir up [fan into flame], the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, love and self-control.”

We can all think of any number of things the Holy Spirit has stirred up in us since our confirmations, when we were anointed in the service of the Anointed One, the Righteous Branch, the One who has come and comes today and is coming again.

Today’s First Lesson is taken from the prophet Jeremiah, who writes in the 6th Century B.C. about a king named Zedekiah. The name “Zedekiah” means “the Lord is my righteousness.” Zedekiah was a well-meaning but ineffectual ruler, paralyzed and trapped by the policies of his princes, a puppet of Nebuchadnezzar the King of Babylon. Zedekiah was the last sad King of Judah, and his kingdom was utterly crushed by Babylon.

That was the end of the road for David’s dynasty. The Jews thought they were all washed up. Yet the Lord says through Jeremiah the prophet: “I will stir up this mess. Out of this mess I will raise up a righteous branch who will live up to Zedekiah’s name. This anointed one, this messiah, will really rule with righteousness. He will rule like a king and not like a

puppet. Even out of this mess you have made I can stir up the Righteous Branch. I can bless even this mess.”

Jeremiah was bold to prophesy a Righteous Branch in a dark time—a branch springing, of all places, out of David’s line. David is one of the most human, earthy, many-faceted characters in the Old Testament. The line of the Righteous Branch would involve Bathsheba, with whom David committed adultery and then had her husband killed in battle. Talk about God writing straight with crooked lines! Jeremiah prophesies the Righteous Branch from David’s line, with all its flaws! In all the breakdowns of history—breakdowns which affect all of us—a breakthrough, decisive and final, will occur. Righteousness is going to erupt through all the cracks!

Behold, thy King cometh unto thee! This is the awesome Advent proclamation. Behold, the Bridegroom comes! Prepare the marriage feast! God is going to marry His people! He is the Saviour of the body—He loves her and gives Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her by the washing of the Word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

The great joy of our life in Him is that we can be celebrants of the Holy Spirit, celebrants of His life, with creation, and everything at hand, restored in Him as a participation in His life. In Him and because of Him, God has become our life. God makes Himself our food.

Today’s First Lesson includes the Epistle for the Sunday next before Advent, the end of the long Trinity season, the last Sunday of the Church Year, the Collect for which I just read you. On that day, we stand on the threshold of a new Church Year, which begins the following Sunday, the First Sunday of Advent. The great and solemn Advent warning is “Behold, thy King cometh unto thee!” That is why the Collect I quoted says, “Stir up the wills of thy faithful people.” Our wills are the

mainsprings of our lives, and we want them stirred up for Him, the way logs in a fire are stirred up, so that the gift that is in us through the laying on of the bishop’s hands can plenteously bring forth good works in us. Every good deed offered up to our Lord is fresh fuel for the flame of His love. Be stirred up, to meet the King, to make decisions for Christ!

On that particular Sunday, this morning’s First Lesson forms the Epistle that is paired with a Gospel passage drawn from the sixth Chapter of St. John. In that account of Our Lord’s miraculous feeding of five thousand Jews, we see how the Church Year is climaxed by what is central in our lives: Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist.

The miracle of the loaves and fishes points to the miracle of the Mass. Our Lord proclaims Himself the Bread of Life. He gets things so stirred up on the hillside with that great crowd that there are twelve large, hamper-sized baskets left over from the initial offering of five barley loaves and two small fish. God will not be undone in generosity. The Apostles, and all of us, are wide-eyed with joy, an exuberance of joy as a pure gift, the only really transforming power in the world, the fragrance of the Holy Spirit.

The crowd that Jesus fed wants to make Him their king, missing the point that He already is their King, the fulfillment not just of our bodily needs, but of our deepest hungers, our greatest thirsts, our strongest yearnings. He is the Lord our Righteousness, the real Zedekiah, the embodiment of what had collapsed in Zedekiah the wimp. Our Lord embodies the righteousness that cannot be earned, bought or manipulated. He can only be received, as a gift, lavished out upon us, while we are yet sinners.

The first half of our Church Year celebrated, Sunday by Sunday, the significant events in Our Lord’s life and ministry among us. This next half, the long season of Trinitytide, is our time to consider the elements of the Faith He taught us and the