

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
The Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Trinity²

The Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the eighteenth Verse of the fourth Chapter of the Second Book of the Kings, commonly called the Fourth Book of the Kings.⁴

“And when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers. And he said unto his father, My head, my head. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother. And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died. And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out. And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again. And he said, Wherefore wilt thou go to him to day? it is neither new moon, nor sabbath. And she said, It shall be well. Then she saddled an ass, and said to her servant, Drive, and go forward; slack not thy riding for me, except I bid thee. So she went and came unto the man of God to mount Carmel. And it came to pass, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi [**geh-HAZE-eye**] his servant, Behold, yonder is that Shunammite [**SHOE-numb-ight**]: Run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child? And she answered, It is well. And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the feet: but Gehazi [**geh-HAZE-eye**] came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her: and the LORD hath hid it from me, and hath not told me. Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me? Then he said to Gehazi [**geh-HAZE-eye**], Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way: if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the child. And the mother

of the child said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose, and followed her. And Gehazi [*geh-HAZE-eye*] passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child; but there was neither voice, nor hearing. Wherefore he went again to meet him, and told him, saying, The child is not awaked. And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the LORD. And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm. Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. And he called Gehazi [*geh-HAZE-eye*], and said, Call this Shunammite [*SHOE-numb-ight*]. So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son. Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the eighteenth Verse of the ninth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.⁵

“While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live. And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did his disciples.

“And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment: For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole. But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the

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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 Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Trinity, 2008.

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

⁴ II Kings 4:18-37 (KJV).

⁵ St. Matthew 9:18-26 (KJV).

⁶ St. Matthew 9:20-22 (RSV).

⁷ St. Matthew 8:1-4.

⁸ St. Luke 10:31-32.

⁹ St. Matthew 12:10-13; St. Luke 6:1-10.

¹⁰ *See, e.g.*, St. Luke 13:10-17; St. Luke 14:1-6; St. John 5:5-11.

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tural limitations of any society are mere artifacts, that is, the products of human activity. Therefore they are simply aspects of the created order.

Now think of this principle as it applies to those people who promote social and political agenda that contravene the Church's teachings. The ordination of women is one such issue; various sexual depravities are others. Frequently these advocates argue that if Jesus were present on earth today, He would be doing just what they wish now to do, or would be promoting the causes they promote, only in New Testament times He could not do those things because then He was restricted by the *mores* of ancient times.

Conclusion:

This, of course, is arrant nonsense. Because if Jesus Christ is Who we say He is, each time we recite one of the authentic Creeds, then He is, in His own Person, God, and a participant in the original act of creation, then He is superior to the entire created order. Thus, as part of that order, He is also superior to the taboos, prejudices, expectations, conventions, and other cultural limitations that exist within it.

So I ask you now: If a person claims that the divine Jesus Christ—who as we have seen actually flouted many of the most important Jewish taboos whenever He found it necessary to do so—if a person claims that the divine Jesus Christ was bound and limited by the cultural and religious presuppositions of ancient Jewish society, is not that person effectively denying the divinity of Jesus?

And can someone who denies the divinity of Jesus still be regarded as being, in any meaningful sense, a Christian?

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woman was made whole from that hour. And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise, He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn. But when the people were put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose. And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: "And behold, a woman who had suffered a hemorrhage for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment; for she said to herself, 'If I only touch his garment, I shall be made well.' Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, 'Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.'"⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction, Theme and Development:

In today's Second Lesson, we see Jesus healing two people but we tend to concentrate our attention upon the healing of the daughter of the leader of the local synagogue. There are two reasons for this concentration, first because that seems to be the main event in the eyes of the Evangelist who wrote this account, and second because this is one of the few instances of that most dramatic of all healings, the raising of someone from the dead.

So in the forward-moving energy of the account's story line and in the life-and-death nature of that healing, it seems to take over the stage and push the second healing very much into the background. After all, that second event occurs literally by-the-by, as Jesus is on His way to the main event, and anyway it is no return from the dead but merely the curing of a physical inconvenience. So the woman with

the hemorrhage is either routinely overlooked or she is treated as being just part of the background to the scene.

This disregard scarcely does that woman justice. For her, quite apart from her physical suffering, which was certainly more than enough, that hemorrhage was in effect a social death because in Jewish eyes it rendered her ritually unclean. No one who knew of it would come near her for fear of being defiled by her touch; in fact, most would avoid any place she had sat down and, in the case of extremely observant Jews, might even avoid the places where she had walked.

So this medical problem rendered her effectively an outcast, to almost the same extent as was the leper whom Jesus had cured in the chapter just before this one.⁷ Until Jesus had compassion on them, both those sufferers were condemned to a sort of living death, deprived of human contact and comfort but, unlike the dead girl, aware of their loss and able to feel its pain during every waking moment.

Thus when she helped herself to some of Christ's divine power, by reaching out of the crowd and touching his clothing, her life as a member of that society was restored to her. I would be very surprised if, to her, this was not just as significant an event as was the restoration of the synagogue leader's daughter to him.

But there is another aspect to this particular healing, one that I have never seen discussed anywhere. As an observant Jew, the human Jesus was just as much subject to the social imperative to maintain ritual cleanliness as were any of the other members of that crowd. Yet He did not even remark upon that aspect of the woman's touching Him, even though that act would, at least in theory, have barred Him from participating in the worship of the Temple until He had gone through a lengthy process of ritual cleansing. He did

not even speak about His own role in her healing; in fact, all He said was that *her own* faith had worked that miracle.

This, by the way, was the reason that, in the story of the Good Samaritan, the priest and the Levite passed by on the other side of the road from the man who had been wounded by robbers. Had he been dead, or had he died while they were tending to him, they would have become ritually unclean and thereby ineligible to complete their terms of service at the Temple.⁸

Yet Our Lord made no objection to this diseased woman's touching Him. Instead, He first confirmed to her the importance of her faith and then simply carried on His way, going to where He was needed to raise the dead girl back to life. In this, He was demonstrating silently a principle that He also sometimes demonstrated audibly, that is, that He was not bound by the taboos, prejudices, expectations, conventions, and other cultural limitations of Jewish society.

Let me repeat that: Jesus was and is the Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy and Undivided Trinity, simultaneously fully human and fully divine, and, as such, He was not bound by the taboos, prejudices, expectations, conventions, and other cultural limitations of contemporary Jewish society—or, for that matter, by those of any other human society in any other time or place.

This was in precisely the same spirit as that in which He healed the man with the withered hand, even though that man approached Him on the sacrosanct Jewish Sabbath day.⁹ Nor was that by any means the only such healing He conducted on a Sabbath;¹⁰ indeed, St. Luke seems positively to glory in recounting those occasions.

It is important for us to remember this because the taboos, prejudices, expectations, conventions, and other cul-