

Sermon for Morning Prayer
Sexagesima Sunday

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fourth Verse of the fiftieth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.²

“... The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.

“The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.

“For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord GOD will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up.

“Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twelfth Chapter of the Second Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians.³

“It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I

knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me. And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: "[T]he Lord ... said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness..."⁴ In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction:

Today's First Lesson is what is called the "third Servant Song" of Isaiah. The Servant to whom the prophet re-

fers, taught by God, brings God's comfort to the weary Israelites who reciprocate by treating their comforter despicably.⁵ Such treatment was the lot of those who preached God's word in the Old Testament and in the New and it is still the lot of many today.

Theme:

In today's Second Lesson, St. Paul relates his own personal weaknesses, which on his own would have left him unable to carry out the mission Christ laid upon him. However, he also recounts how God always gave him the strength and resources to do what he had before him to do.

Development:

1. Out of experiences not unlike Paul's, Isaiah tells us that the Lord always helps his servants.

“For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.”⁶ This passage from the King James Version may be a bit clearer in a more contemporary translation: Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame.”⁷

Everyone who carries the word of the Lord into the world – which should mean every Christian – may be comforted by Isaiah's assurance that “the Sovereign Lord helps me ... and I know I will not be put to shame.”

2. Isaiah also assures us that those who seek to obstruct the Lord's work will fail in the end.

“He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord GOD will help me; who

is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up.”⁸ Or, again in a more modern translation: “[H]e who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! It is the Sovereign LORD who helps me. Who is he that will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up.”⁹

If we remain steadfast in doing the Lord’s work, we will outlast those who revile and obstruct us and they will wear out like Isaiah’s old, moth-eaten clothing. The Church which began by being persecuted for three centuries still stands, strong and upright, while even the tombs of its persecutors have disappeared.

3. Finally, Isaiah assures us that the Lord will always provide us guidance, no matter how dark our circumstances may appear.

“Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God.”¹⁰ Or, again: “Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God.”¹¹

The Lord is our light so we need have no fear of walking in darkness, whether spiritual or physical.

Conclusion:

Three times the Apostle Paul begged the Lord to lift from him the burden of his apostleship and the Lord answered his prayer. He did not answer it by lifting that burden, as Paul sought; instead, He answered it by giving Paul the strength and perseverance to carry on with it.

Just as His strength was sufficient for Paul, so is it sufficient for us; we have but to ask Him for it. This is true whether we need His support in some great mission, such as Paul’s, or whether we simply need help in bearing the burdens of our everyday lives. It is especially true when we are confronted with someone who needs to hear the Good News of Christ, or needs us to invite him or her to come to church. If we pray God for the means, He will send us the words we need to say and we will be as Isaiah was:

“The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary....”¹²

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The Rev’d Canon John A. Hollister¹³
February 15, 2009.

¹ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER x (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² Isaiah 50:4-10 (KJV).

³ II Corinthians 12:1-12 (KJV).

⁴ II Corinthians 12:8-9a (KJV).

⁵ HERBERT G. MAY AND BRUCE M. METZGER, EDs., THE NEW OXFORD ANNOTATED BIBLE WITH THE APOCRYPHA, REVISED STANDARD VERSION 886 n. (Oxford University Press 1977).

⁶ Isaiah 50:7 (KJV).

⁷ *Ibid.* (NIV).

⁸ Isaiah 50:8-9 (KJV).

⁹ *Ibid.* (NIV).

¹⁰ Isaiah 50:10 (KJV).

¹¹ *Ibid.* (NIV).

¹² *Ibid.* 50:4a (KJV).

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