

Sermon for Morning Prayer

St. Matthew's Day

Lessons:

First Lesson: Here beginneth the fifteenth Verse of the nineteenth Chapter of the first Book of the Kings.¹

“And the Lord said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael [**HA-Zeh-el**] to be king over Syria: And Jehu [**GEE-hoo**] the son of Nimshi [**NIM-she**] shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha [**EE-Lye-shuh**] the son of Shaphat [**SHAFF-at**] of Abelmeholah [**Ay-bell-me-HOH-lah**] shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room. So he departed thence, and found Elisha [**EE-Lye-shuh**] the son of Shaphat [**SHAFF-at**], who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah [**EE-Lye-juh**] passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him. And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah [**EE-Lye-juh**], and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee? And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose, and went after Elijah [**EE-Lye-juh**], and ministered unto him.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the sixteenth Verse of the nineteenth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.

“And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit

⁶ 1 Kings 17:31.

⁷ *Id.* 17:32-33.

⁸ *Id.* 19:18.

⁹ *Id.* 18:4.

¹⁰ Elijah also had occasion to reprove the similarly erring King of Judah, 2 Chronicles 21:12-15.

¹¹ 2 Kings 2:1-15.

¹² St. Matthew 9:9.

¹³ Vidkun Quisling was the leader of the Fascist puppet regime under Nazi Germany's WWII occupation of Norway, whose name has become a generic term for Nazi collaborators.

¹⁴ Sometime Priest in Charge, St. James of Jerusalem Anglican Catholic Church, Erie PA.

adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible. Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the First Lesson: "And the Lord said unto him, Go ... and ... anoint Hazael [**HA-Zeh-el**] to be king over Syria ... [a]nd Jehu [**GEE-hoo**] the son of Nimshi [**NIM-she**] shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel ... and Elisha [**EE-Lye-shuh**] the son of Shaphat [**SHAFF-at**] of Abelmeholah [**Ay-bell-me-HOH-lah**] shalt thou anoint to be prophet

We must assure that they have stipends sufficient to permit them and their families to live in decency and we must provide them with adequate health insurance and the prospect of a secure retirement.

And, finally, we must make sure they have the resources they need in order to carry out their callings. That means we must build and maintain suitable church buildings, we must raise the funds necessary for travel and programs, we must make it possible for the church to advertise and get its message before the public. If we fail in these seemingly mundane matters, then we are placing obstacles in the way of their fulfilling what God has called them to do.

--oo0oo--

The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister¹⁴
September 21, 2008.

¹ Book of Common Prayer (PECUSA 1928), Lectionary of 1943.

² I Kings 19:15-16 (KJV).

³ St. Matthew 9:9 (KJV); cf. St. Mark 2:14 and St. Luke 5:27. Both Mark and Luke refer to him as "Levi", to which Mark adds "son of Alphaeus".

⁴ In 1943, after several years' work by a revision commission, the Episcopal Church in the USA adopted a new Table of Psalms and Lessons for Morning and Evening Prayer. This new Table replaced the one originally included in the 1928 edition of the Book of Common Prayer and is the reason that most "1928" Prayer Books seen today contain in their very first pages a Certificate of Conformity (to the Standard Book) that is dated 1945. Books of Common Prayer now sold by the Anglican Parishes Association contain both Tables, that of 1928 and that of 1943. Many feel that while the Sunday series of Lessons in the 1943 Table may have been an improvement for congregational worship, the weekday series in the 1928 Table is superior for daily reading because it covers more Scripture in the course of a year.

⁵ These are not to be confused with the identically-named Jehoram and Ahaziah who were close relatives and who reigned during this same period, in exactly reversed order, over the southern Jewish kingdom of Judah.

God called Elisha [EE-Lye-shuh] to serve Him by teaching and leading the people of Israel [IZ-rail]. He was, of course, particularly to lead them after the overthrow of the apostate Ahab [AY-hab] and the foreign seductress Jezebel [JEZZ-uh-bell] in the continued restoration of God's Covenant with Israel [IZ-rail]. Christ called Matthew to be one of His Apostles, to be trained and then commissioned as one of the first generation of senior leaders of His new Church. As an Apostle, Matthew's first duty was to bring people to Christ and so to save their souls; his second duty was to watch over their welfare after they had put on Christ.

All true callings share this feature: ultimately, they are for the benefit of others, not of the one called, whether that benefit be religious teaching and edification, educational enlightenment, artistic uplift, or political or military leadership.

Conclusion:

But if a true calling comes from God, not from the one called, if it may well involve sacrifice of the personal interests of the one called and his throwing himself onto God's care and providence, and if it must involve service to the welfare and needs of others, why is this lesson important for us?

One reason is that we must be cognizant of this aspect of the Church's leadership. We must seek diligently to select and install only those men who have actually received this high calling from God.

Another reason is that our leaders, like Matthew, have been called away from their own lives in order to better ours. Thus, in response to that sacrifice, we have a corresponding obligation to make sure that they are taken care of, for we are the instruments of God's providence in this matter.

in thy room."² In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction:

The Mass lections appointed for today naturally include the well-known account of how our Lord called Matthew away from "sitting at the receipt of custom"³ and into His service as an Apostle. Yet our Morning Prayer Lessons make no direct reference to the occasion for the feast day which celebrates that calling and its results. Instead, we are treated, first, to the calling of an Old Testament prophet and then to our Lord's very gratifying allocution on the problems laden camels encounter in narrow passages and on rich peoples' poor prospects for entering heaven.

Theme:

But our First Lesson is the account of a calling, of God's calling, through the Old Testament's greatest prophet, Elijah [EE-Lye-juh], of Elijah's [EE-Lye-juhs] successor, Elisha [EE-Lye-shuh]. This suggests that the Church, as it considered what themes are appropriate to this Feast,⁴ did not think it particularly important to regale us at Morning Prayer with the account of how one individual tax collector suddenly saw, and repented, the error of his ways. Instead, the Church seems to want us now to reflect in a more general way on the process of God's calling someone into His service, what that means, how that comes about, and what the appropriate response to it is.

Development:

- 1. A true calling comes from God, not from a man or from men, although men are usually the messengers who tell someone that he or she has been called by God.**

After Moses, Elijah [EE-Lye-juh] was the most powerful prophet of the Old Testament. He served God during the reigns of the apostate King Ahab [AY-hab] and his foreign, pagan wife Queen Jezebel [JEZZ-uh-bell], and their sons Ahaziah [AY-hazz-Eye-uh] and Jehoram [Juh-WHORE-um], in the northern southern kingdom of Israel [IZ-rail].⁵

Throughout his entire prophetic career, Elijah [EE-Lye-juh] struggled against the worship of the pagan god Baal [BUH-awl] that the Phoenecian [Feh-KNEE-shen] princess Jezebel [JEZZ-uh-bell] had imported when she became King Ahab's [AY-habs] queen⁶ and that the weak Ahab [AY-hab] had permitted to become the dominant religion of the country.⁷ At Israel's lowest point, there were only seven thousand faithful worshippers of the true God left in the land⁸ and only one hundred true prophets left, hiding in fear of their lives⁹ and so unable to lead that remnant.

It was Elijah [EE-Lye-juh] who led the reformation of the country and the restoration of the worship of the true God.¹⁰ Thus the selection of his successor was a vital matter and, as the account in today's First Lesson makes clear, God did not leave that selection to Elijah [EE-Lye-juh] himself. Instead, God chose Elisha [EE-Lye-shuh] as the man He wanted to lead Israel's [IZ-rails] religious life after Elijah's [EE-Lye-juhs] ascension into heaven,¹¹ pointed that man out to Elijah [EE-Lye-juh], and told Elijah [EE-Lye-juh] to commission Elisha [EE-Lye-shuh] as God's new chief prophet in Israel [IZ-rail]. Thus Elijah's [EE-Lye-juhs] religious reform and restoration would be sure to continue.

That is the connection between today's First Lesson and the calling of St. Matthew to be an Apostle, which is recounted in today's Gospel for Mass¹² and is the reason for the Feast we celebrate today: Matthew, like Elisha [EE-Lye-shuh], did not choose to be a servant of God, God called him

and, through His agent on earth, commissioned him for his new rôle.

Clearly, this rôle was not something Matthew would have chosen for himself because as an employee of the tax farm operated by Roman investors who had bought the franchise from the imperial treasury, he was regarded by his fellow Jews as a Quisling [KWIZ-ling],¹³ a despised traitor whose very occupation acknowledged and accepted the impious foreign political domination which was a violation of their national religion.

2. A true calling demands that we leave our own personal pursuits in order to perform some task for God.

Elisha [EE-Lye-shuh] was plowing a field when Elijah [EE-Lye-juh] came by and cast his mantle over the ploughman, as a sign that he was taking over his life. That is, Elisha [EE-Lye-shuh] was busy about the important daily business of feeding himself and his family. Matthew was making a living at the high cost of cutting himself off from his family, neighbors, and co-religionists, so we may surmise that for unknown reasons he simply had no other options available.

Yet each of these men, when called by God, abandoned those important alimentary pursuits and took off, trusting in God to provide for their sustenance and that of their families.

All true callings from God may involve this same possibility, that of putting ourselves at risk and even our loved ones, and trusting in God to care for us and for them.

3. A true calling is a call to serve: to serve God by serving those He loves.