
Sermon for Morning Prayer
Trinity XXI

Lessons:

First Lesson: Here beginneth the fifteenth Verse of the fifty-ninth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.¹

“... And the Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment.

“And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him. For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak. According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompence. So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him.

“And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord. As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

Second Lesson: Here beginneth the tenth Chapter of the Second Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians.

“Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you: But I beseech you, that I may not be bold when I am present with that con-

² II Corinthians 10:7 (KJV).

³ Isaiah 1:4 (KJV).

⁴ Isaiah 3:8-11 (KJV).

⁵ Isaiah 59:18-19 (KJV).

⁶ Isaiah 59:20 (KJV).

⁷ Isaiah 49:6 (KJV).

⁸ Isaiah 59:20 (KJV).

⁹ Isaiah 4:3 (KJV).

¹⁰ II Corinthians 10:2b-4 (KJV).

¹¹ II Corinthians 10:7b & 17-18 (KJV).

¹² Isaiah 59:15b, 18-19 (KJV).

¹³ Sometime Priest in Charge, St. James of Jerusalem Anglican Catholic Church, Erie PA.

fidence, wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's.... But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's.”² In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction:

In times past, people who went to church heard regularly about many things that made them nervous about their own ultimate prospects: about our ever-present sin, about the real possibility of damnation, about the avenging wrath of God on those who have affronted Him, about our desperate need for divine aid to overcome our own weaknesses, and about God's infinite goodness and mercy in sending to us His Son to be our Redeemer. Funeral sermons, which were quite frequent before the advent of the first anti-bacterial

For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.”¹¹

Conclusion:

As Christians, therefore, we must constantly remind ourselves that sin is a reality, judgement is a reality, and, therefore, if we sin, that has real consequences for us:

“[T]he Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment.... According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompence. So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him.”¹²

To enable us to survive this judgement, God has given us the power to overcome our temptations to sin but once we have put on Christ, we have received not only the power to do so, we have accepted the obligation to do so.

Christ came to save mankind but that gift came at a price. God will save us but, once we have heard the Gospel message and have believed it, we cannot then turn away from it. Living a Christian life is both the joy and the burden of each individual Christian and we must each examine and assess every one of our own individual actions with that in mind.

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

3. **St. Paul tells the Corinthians that, as Isaiah had prophesied, once God sent the Redeemer promised by Isaiah, and once they accepted that Redeemer – that is, once they have become Christians – then they must to live as befits their Christian vocation.**

Isaiah had foretold, “And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one among the living in Jerusalem....”⁹ As we have seen, the Redeemer of whom Isaiah prophesied is Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

St. Paul addresses the Corinthians who have come out of paganism into Christianity and reminds them that they are surrounded by those who do not understand this conversion: “[S]ome ... think of us as if we walked according to the flesh. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)”¹⁰

In other words, although our bodies remain part of this incarnate world, the spirits that animate those bodies have been changed by our baptism into our Christian vocation. Now we have been given super-natural, that is, more than merely natural, aid to overcome the temptations of this world. That we are so pointedly told we *can* withstand those temptations is an inferential, but nonetheless definite, message that we *should* do so, thus making use of the divine assistance with which God has gifted us.

But we dare not let that divine connection go to our heads and swell them, for that power is God’s, not ours: “If any man trust to himself that he is Christ’s, let him of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ’s, even so are we Christ’s.... But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

medications in the 1930s, concentrated on the “Four Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell.

These messages, which made up the standard fare for sermon audiences in our grandparents’ time, have become almost as extinct as the Great Auk or the Dodo. Today, great pressure is brought to bear on the clergy to preach only those things that make the congregation comfortable, that reassure them they are good people who think good thoughts and who therefore should get credit for doing good things because, regardless of the actual results of their actions, they meant well.

Strongly discouraged is any hint that things might not be entirely as they should be, that sin is a personal defect and not a social dislocation, that any repentance is required of the listeners, that angering God is both possible and dangerous, that the Christian religion is an active and arduous vocation of constant, life-long work rather than an entertainment venue for a spare hour on Sunday mornings. Any such disquieting notions are banned because they might drive out some potential attendees and thereby prevent a congregation from growing into a much-desired “mega church” with thousands of paying members, several well-paid, full-time clergy, a host of pleasant programs, and luxuriant cars and comfortable homes for the staff, all paid for by the hordes of bodies that lounge in the theater-style seating, watching the rock bands and listening to the jazzy “preaching”.

Theme:

Contrary to the assumptions of the theorists of the “seeker-friendly” church growth movement, sin is an ever-present reality. Just as God is real, so, too, is the possibility that we will violate God’s instructions to us, that we will do those very things that distance us from God. In fact, this is not just a possibility; it is not even a probability; it is a certainty. Human beings have an inborn tendency to do just

those things we ought not to do and to leave undone just those things that we ought to have done.

This tendency to blunder off the path God has marked off for us is what we call “original sin”. It would be our infallible destruction except that God, in His unfathomable mercy and out of His boundless love for us, has made it possible to overcome this spiritual disease which, without such super-human assistance, would bring us down.

Development:

1. Isaiah prophesied that God would send judgement upon those who affront Him as well as those who please him.

At the very beginning of his prophecies, Isaiah told the Hebrews, “Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.”³ And,

“... Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen: because their tongue and their doings are against the Lord, to provoke the eyes of his glory. The shew [SHOW] of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! For they have rewarded evil unto themselves. Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked! It shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him.”⁴

It is hard to imagine more definite statements than these of impending judgement, for good or for ill. Nor is that judgement merely an awards banquet for those who have excelled at approved social-service works. It carries the very real threat of retribution for wrongdoing, as today’s First Lesson declares:

“According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompence. So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him.”⁵

2. Isaiah prophesied that God would send a Redeemer who can reconcile and save those who have affronted God.

“And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgressions in Jacob, saith the Lord.”⁶ God Himself says to this Redeemer: “[T]hou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee to be a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.”⁷ And again, “And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord.”⁸

This, after all, was the whole point of the Hebrews’ Old Testament experience: they were first created a people by God, then fostered and developed by God, until finally they became a suitable religious and cultural matrix into which God could pour His final revelation: He Himself, come in human flesh to be with us and teach us.

That final revelation does not merely come to us by the means of that incarnate God, enfleshed and with a truly human nature united to His divine one; that incarnate God *is* that final revelation. And what He has revealed to us is that He came to save us, inevitably given to sin though we be.