

**Sermon for Morning Prayer
The Sixth Sunday After Trinity**

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the sixteenth Verse of the nineteenth Chapter of the Second Book of Samuel.²

“And Shimei [**SHIMM-ee-eye**] the son of Gera [**GEAR-ah**], a Benjamite [**BEN-jah-might**], which was of Bahurim [**Buh-WHO-rimm**], hasted and came down with the men of Judah to meet king David. And there were a thousand men of Benjamin [**BEN-jah-minn**] with him, and Ziba [**ZYE-bah**] the servant of the house of Saul, and his fifteen sons and his twenty servants with him; and they went over Jordan before the king. And there went over a ferry boat to carry over the king’s household, and to do what he thought good. And Shimei [**SHIMM-ee-eye**] the son of Gera [**GEAR-ah**] fell down before the king, as he was come over Jordan; And said unto the king, Let not my lord impute iniquity unto me, neither do thou remember that which thy servant did perversely the day that my lord the king went out of Jerusalem, that the king should take it to his heart. For thy servant doth know that I have sinned: therefore, behold, I am come the first this day of all the house of Joseph to go down to meet my lord the king. But Abishai [**Abb-EYE-shy**] the son of Zeruah [**Zair-oo-EYE-ah**] answered and said, Shall not Shimei [**SHIMM-ee-eye**] be put to death for this, because he cursed the Lord’s anointed? And David said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruah [**Zair-oo-EYE-ah**], that ye should this day be adversaries unto me? shall there any man be put to death this day in Israel? for do not I know that I am this day king over Israel? Therefore the king said unto Shimei [**SHIMM-ee-eye**], Thou shalt not die. And the king sware unto him.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the thirty-eighth Verse of the fifth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Matthew.³

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the First Lesson: “Therefore the king said unto Shimei [**SHIMM-ee-eye**], Thou shalt not die. And the king sware unto him.”⁴ In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction:

Today’s First Lesson is a portion of the account of King David’s return to Jerusalem after the quelling of the

sons to break his promise.”¹¹ Had Shimei [SHIM-ee-eye] remembered that simple lesson, he might well have lived to die a natural death. And while we remember that lesson, and apply it to our outward affairs, we can – and should – still struggle to remember Our Lord’s contrary lesson of selfless forbearance and forgiveness, and to apply that principle in our personal lives and, especially, within the Church.

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The Rev’d Canon John A. Hollister¹²
July 19, 2009.

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

² II Samuel 19:16-23 (KJV).

³ St. Matthew 5:38-48 (KJV).

⁴ II Samuel 19:23 (KJV).

⁵ II Kings 16:5-13.

⁶ I Kings 2:5-9.

⁷ Ironically, another was Joab, the general who had given him the victory over Absalom that secured David’s kingdom but whom David had never forgiven because that same victory cost the disloyal Absalom’s death, II Kings 2:5-6, 28-34.

⁸ II Samuel 16:5-13.

⁹ I Kings 2:36-46.

¹⁰ Psalm 146:2a (MCV).

¹¹ NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI, *THE PRINCE*, Chap. 18.

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rebellion of his son, Absalom [ABB-suh-lomb]. At the beginning of that rebellion, Absalom [ABB-suh-lomb] appeared so likely to succeed that David and his remaining faithful followers vacated the capital city, Jerusalem, and took refuge in the remote country to gather his forces. On David’s way out of the city, one of King Saul’s surviving relatives, Shimei [SHIMM-ee-eye], understandably elated at this visible setback to the man who had destroyed his royal house and supplanted his line in the kingship, ran along beside the road, jeering at David and cursing him and his prospects.⁵

Today’s First Lesson tells what happened when the victorious King David returned to the capital, after successfully putting down Absalom [ABB-suh-lomb] and his army. As David approached the city, Shimei [SHIMM-ee-eye] came out, cast himself on David’s mercy, and asked forgiveness for his transgression in insulting the King. In honor of the great victory God had just given him, and in consideration of the great loss of life Israel had suffered in the rebellion, David promised the terrified Shimei [SHIMM-ee-eye] that the King would spare his life.

Theme:

Shimei [SHIMM-ee-eye] would have done well to pay attention to the strict letter of David’s promise, for the promise of a King, statesman or politician, even when it is kept, is kept only so far as is convenient to the one who makes it.

Development:

We are told in the First Book of the Kings how, on his deathbed, King David instructed his son, Solomon, that after David’s death, Solomon was to wreak vengeance on certain men who had incurred David’s wrath but whom David was bound, by political considerations or by oath, to

spare.⁶ Apparently David felt that his oaths ceased to bind him once he was dead, or perhaps he comforted himself with the sophistry that having his son commit an act that he himself dared not was not the same thing as his doing it himself.

This is a common idea among politicians and statesmen, and runs counter to the common-sense realization that, morally, the act of an authorized agent or representative is the same as the personal act of that agent's principal.

Among the men for whom David thus arranged his posthumous revenge⁷ was Shimei [**SHIMM-ee-eye**] the Benjamite [**BEN-jah-might**]. David stated to Solomon his reason for this instruction which was the brooding resentment he had harbored for many years for the way Shimei [**SHIM-ee-eye**] insulted and embarrassed him by taunting him at the low point of his rule, when it looked as though he might lose control of the kingdom to his more popular son Absalom [**ABB-suh-lomb**].⁸

So Solomon arranged to “set Shimei [**SHIMM-ee-eye**] up” by making him promise to remain within the city limits of Jerusalem. And when, as Solomon must have foreseen, the management of Shimei's [**SHIMM-ee-eyes**] household led him to make a temporary trip a short way outside the city, David had him killed – murdered, really – while, doubtless, quieting his conscience by telling himself that Shimei [**SHIMM-ee-eye**] had been warned in advance of the risks he was running.⁹

It would be difficult to find a greater contrast than that between, on the one hand, David and Solomon's cold, calculating and envious scheme to trap and murder Shimei merely for insulting David's love of himself and, on the other hand, the selfless forgiveness to which Our Lord enjoins us in today's Second Lesson.

Consider, first, what it must have been like to live under King Solomon's ruthless military dictatorship, analogous to a modern police state, the first act of which was the murder of Shimei [**SHIM-ee-eye**] and the other men against whom David reached from the grave to exercise his long-held grudges, often over very minor matters. Then consider what it would be like to live in a society that followed Jesus's dictum, to forgive even the most grievous injuries and to suspend and let go of all grudges.

Conclusion:

For us, today, it is too much to hope that we can live in a political society that operates according to Jesus's principles of forbearance and forgiveness. In that outward, secular realm, therefore, we are well advised to remember, as Shimei [**SHIM-ee-eye**] should have, to put no reliance in the promises of princes – or, in our situation, in the promises of politicians.

Most of those who seek worldly power will say and do anything that will help them attain their goals. They will promise us all full employment to be achieved by the government's massive spending of the same money they are taking from us as individuals. They will assure us of free and adequate health care without significant cost to those who consume these services. They will guarantee us simpler, more transparent government while they are strangling us with ever more reporting requirements and other regulations.

And when one of these defaulting politicians is taxed with his earlier assurances, which he has so signally failed to live up to, he will blandly tell us, as the Nixon White House did, “That statement is not operational as of this time”.

Thus we see how wise was the Psalmist when he said, “O put not your trust in princes”.¹⁰ Or, as the Italian political theorist said, “A prince never lacks legitimate rea-