

Sermon for Morning Prayer
Trinity VII, 2002

Lessons:

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fifth Verse of the sixth Chapter of The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus:¹

“Sweet language will multiply friends: and a fairspeaking tongue will increase kind greetings. Be in peace with many: nevertheless have but one counselor of a thousand. If thou wouldest get a friend, prove him first, and be not hasty to credit him. For some man is a friend for his own occasion, and will not abide in the day of thy trouble. And there is a friend, who being turned to enmity and strife will discover thy reproach. Again, some friend is a companion at the table, and will not continue in the day of thy affliction. But in thy prosperity he will be as thyself, and will be bold over thy servants. If thou be brought low, he will be against thee, and will hide himself from thy face. Separate thyself from thine enemies, and take heed of thy friends. A faithful friend is a strong defence: and he that hath found such an one hath found a treasure. Nothing doth countervail a faithful friend, and his excellency is invaluable. A faithful friend is the medicine of life; and they that fear the Lord shall find him. Whoso feareth the Lord shall direct his friendship aright: for as he is, so shall his neighbor be also.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twelfth Verse of the fifteenth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John.

“This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth:

If we can seize the moment as Philip did, then we are, in fact, being missionaries as Christ called us to be.

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

² St. John 15: 26-27 (KJV).

³ *Id.* 3: 16 (KJV).

⁴ THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 76 (PECUSA 1928). In 16th- and 17th-Century English, “comfortable” meant what we would term “strengthening”.

⁵ In Greek, *Anamnesis*. This does not mean “representation” in the sense of “a picture of something” but “re-presentation” in the sense of “the actual event occurs once again”.

⁶ St. John 15: 12b (KJV).

⁷ *Id.* 15: 16a.

⁸ *Id.* 15: 19.

⁹ This is the principle that theologians call *prevenient grace*, “the grace that goes before us” and, overcoming the spiritual weakness and blindness of our fallen state prior to baptism, permits us to perceive and respond to God’s call.

¹⁰ “[B]ehold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.” St. Luke 24: 49 (KJV).

¹¹ Acts 1: 21-22 (KJV).

¹² St. Matthew 28: 19-20 (KJV).

¹³ *E.g.*, Acts 16: 12-15.

¹⁴ Acts 8: 26-39.

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but I have called you friends; for all the things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. These things I command you, that ye love one another. If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before *it hated* you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me. If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin. He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. But *this cometh to pass*, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause. But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, *even* the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: "[W]hen the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning."²

Conclusion:

By the time we have digested these three points, each of us should be well on our way to framing our own personal answer to that question God has asked us, "What are you doing about My love for you?" One choice is to say, "Thanks, God, but I'm not going to do anything about it." That is clearly not the answer He wants from us.

The other choice is to do what He wants us to do, which is to answer, "I am going to show my love for You, God, by going out and showing Your love to those whom You love, and especially to those who do not yet know You." Even if we make that choice, as we clearly should, we do not necessarily have to leave home, family, and friends to travel to far places as a missionary.

It is always good if some members of the Church do choose to go to far mission fields and if anyone among us shows a bent for that, we should support him or her and the work that he or she undertakes. What we see in Acts of the Apostles, however, is that often the Church spreads most effectively through the everyday lives of its members. Paul, Barnabas, and Luke would arrive in a new town, make one or two key converts, and then those new Christians would spread the Good News among their family and friends.¹³

It was that person-to-person contact among people who already knew each other that really built the bulk of the new Church. Therefore, I suggest to you, each of us should be prepared, at any time and at all times, to seize any opportunity that daily life affords us to speak the Good News of Christ into any receptive ear. Philip was walking down the highway when he met the Ethiopian Queen's Treasurer driving by and discovered that he hungered to know the Gospel.¹⁴

to be an Apostle. And as the Apostles were the leaders of the new Church, so they set the model for the members of that Church: the requirement for an Apostle was to be a witness to Christ, to His deeds, and to His teachings, and so the requirement for a Christian is to be a witness to Christ, to His deeds, and to His teachings.

3. Christ’s task for us is to go out and evangelize the world.

It is a paradox – and Christianity is full of paradoxes – but Christ first called us out of the world, called us to Him, only, in the end, to send us back into that same world, to make us His evangelists and missionaries there. Nevertheless, despite that appearance of paradox, that is precisely what He had done.

Christ set us that task in His own words at the end of St. Matthew’s Gospel, when He gave His final instructions to His Apostles and Disciples: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world.”¹²

This, then, is the explanation for why He called us to Him, called us out of the world, and even, perhaps, an explanation for why that world hates us for being so called to Him. He has called us so that ultimately we will go out into that world as His missionaries, to evangelize that world. “Evangelize” is nothing but a Greek-derived word for “bring the Good News”, so our task as Christ’s missionaries is to bring His Good News to the world.

Of course, if we bring to the world the news of Him, we are doing nothing else than being witnesses to Him....

In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction:

In today’s Second Lesson from St. John’s Gospel, Christ speaks to His disciples, and to us, about *love* and about some of the *implications* or *consequences* of that love. First, He tells us that love comes to ultimately from God, that love is God’s initiative reaching out to draw us to Him. Second, He tells us that if we truly appreciate that God’s reaching out to us in love, then our response will be two-fold.

We will seek to return that love to God, that is, to love Him as much as we can in the same way and to the same extent as He loves us. Then, as part of our response of love toward God, we will seek to love each of our fellow men and women. God’s love of us is what makes us worthy of being loved by others and where God has found our fellows worth loving, we can do no less than accept His decision and act upon it appropriately.

Theme:

This love God expects us to have for our fellow humans is no passive feeling, however. He will not be satisfied if we simply have a warm, fuzzy, generally good will toward other people. After all, God’s love for us is not passive, but active, very active, even to the point of self-sacrifice. Remember, we are told expressly that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”³

This testimony, both to the unbelievable extent of God’s love for us and to the highly active, giving – even self-giving – nature of that love, is so important that Archbishop Cranmer specified that we should read it publicly in every

Mass, as one of the “Comfortable Words”⁴ that prepare us for the re-presentation⁵ of Christ’s sacrifice of Himself. This preparation takes the form of reminding us of the salvation we receive through that gift.

God’s love, His gift to us of Himself, is like a gigantic question. Just as God’s love is always there, reaching out to us, so is this implied question always there, God asking us, “What are you doing about My love for you?”

Development:

Christ told us there are three things that we ought to keep in mind as we decide how to answer that question. First, He called us to Him, we did not independently choose to go to Him. Second, He had a specific criterion for choosing those whom He would call, a criterion which applies to each of us just as it applied to each of the Apostles and Disciples. Third, He had a specific task for us in His mind when He chose us and called us to Him and out of the world.

1. Christ has chosen us and called us to Him, called us out of the world and into His Church.

Christ tells us that because He loves us He has chosen us: “I have loved you”,⁶ He says in today’s Gospel, and also, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.”⁷ But we have a price we must pay for enjoying Christ’s favor that way: “because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.”⁸

With these words, Christ is telling us unmistakable that we did not independently find and choose Him. Instead, He found each of us, chose each of us, and called each of us to Himself.⁹ Further, He tells us, this calling will place us in implacable opposition to the world.

2. Christ’s purpose in calling us to Him is to make us witnesses to Him.

The prime qualification for becoming a Christian is that one will make a suitable witness for Christ. The Church’s primary charge is to go out, convert the world, and make disciples of all nations, so the implication of that is each member of that Church must be an evangelist, a witness.

Of course, this “witnesshood” itself requires that the potential witness have *faith*: who would believe a witness who does not himself believe that to which he testifies? This is why we are often told, particularly by those who call themselves Evangelical Christians, that faith is *all* that is required to be a Christian. That is an oversimplification but faith is certainly the first step toward being an effective witness.

The importance of this status as witness to Christ is illustrated at the opening of Acts of the Apostles. One of the very first things the Apostles did, after Christ’s Ascension and while they were waiting in prayer in the Upper Room, waiting to see what Christ had in store for them,¹⁰ was to select a new Apostle to take up the place vacated by the death of Judas Iscariot.

What was the prime qualification for the men who were to be considered for selection to that position? St. Peter told the other Apostles: “[O]f these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, must one be ordained to be a witness of his resurrection.”¹¹

In other words, it was the ability to serve as a witness to Christ, to testify that the new Apostle had seen with his own eyes the events of Christ’s ministry from the time of His Baptism down to His Resurrection, that made a man eligible