

SERMON FOR LAYREADERS

THE TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Brian McKee¹

First Lesson:²

Here beginneth the first Chapter of the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus.³

“All wisdom cometh from the Lord, and is with him for ever. Who can number the sand of the sea, and the drops of rain, and the days of eternity? Who can find out the height of heaven, and the breadth of the earth, and the deep, and wisdom? Wisdom hath been created before all things, and the understanding of prudence from everlasting. The word of God most high is the fountain of wisdom; and her ways are everlasting commandments. To whom hath the root of wisdom been revealed? or who hath known her wise counsels? [Unto whom hath the knowledge of wisdom been made manifest? and who hath understood her great experience?] There is one wise and greatly to be feared, the Lord sitting upon his throne. He created her, and saw her, and numbered her, and poured her out upon all his works. She is with all flesh according to his gift, and he hath given her to them that love him.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

Second Lesson:⁴

Here beginneth the twenty-fifth Verse of the eighth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John.⁵

“... Then said they unto him, Who art thou? And Jesus saith unto them, Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning. I have many things to say and to judge of you: but he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world

those things which I have heard of him. They understood not that he spake to them of the Father. Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him. As he spake these words, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

“They answered him, We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever; but the Son abideth ever.... If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed..”⁶

Homily:

Many people today, even some who call themselves Christians, think that the concept of “sin” is no longer an appropriate way to understand the condition of our life as human beings. They think that the term is “old fashioned” or “out of date”. Many today choose to believe that there are no moral absolutes. Many delude themselves into thinking that there is no such thing as “sin”.

⁴ *Psalms and Lessons for the Church Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxx (PECUSA 1928/1943).

⁵ St. John 8:25-36 (KJV).

⁶ St. John 8:34-35a & 36 (KJV).

However, the study of the Holy Scriptures, the accumulated wisdom of the Church Catholic, observation of the circumstances of our world, and examination of ourselves, all make it clear that there lies within us all a tendency that is working with such force that it is capable of destroying us. That tendency, that force is sin.

Through repentance and the sacrament of Baptism, we accept Christ as our Saviour. We are cleansed from the sins of our past. We are grafted into the Body of Christ -- the Church. We become Christians. We are free indeed from all the sins of our past.

When we become Christians, are we capable of committing further sins? Or is our inborn nature to commit sins taken away?

If we examine our own lives carefully, we can see that even if we are Christians, we do sometimes “mess up” and commit sins. This is why there is a Prayer of Confession in every Office of the 1928 BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER. Even once we become Christians, we still make mistakes. To stay in God’s favor, and to walk in His ways, we must seek forgiveness of the sins that we commit.

We must hold our redemption and God’s forgiving grace in tension with our tendency as human beings to turn away from God’s ways, and to commit sins, willingly or unwillingly, by word or deed. On our journey toward holiness, we are in constant need of God’s forgiving grace. We must continually evaluate our own lives to see if we are truly living as we should. When we find sin in our lives, then we must seek God’s forgiving grace.

As classic Anglicans, we seek forgiveness not only through the general prayers of confession in the BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER but we also believe in auricular confession to a Priest. On page 88 of the 1928 BOOK OF COMMON

PRAYER, it says: “And because it is requisite that no man should come to the holy communion, but with a full trust in God’s mercy, and with a quiet conscience; therefore if there be any of you, who by this means cannot quiet his own conscience herein, but requireth further comfort or counsel, let him come to me, or to some other minister of God’s Word, and open his grief; that he may receive such godly counsel and advice, as may tend to the quieting of his conscience, and the removing of all scruple and doubtfulness.”

“Residual sin”, as Anglican theologian and priest, The Rev. John Wesley, called this sin after we become Christians, does not mean that we are not real Christians. It does not mean that our new birth through repentance and Baptism is not real or true. Remember the quote from the Second Lesson today: “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”

Instead, “residual sin” is a reminder that we must constantly rely on God’s grace rather than take pride in our salvation. Remember, “pride goeth before a fall.”

Wesley saw that calling our problem sin, willful action setting us against God and turning us away from communion with God, bestows great dignity upon us. We are sinful creatures of a gracious God, whose great love grants us freedom to make choices in regard to our lives, and in regard to our relationships with God and other people. God did not create us as mindless robots who were born incapable of sinning. He created us with free will to choose.

It is God’s will that we should choose His ways, confess our wrongdoings, and willingly accept His forgiving grace given to us through the shedding of His own Incarnate Son’s very Blood on the rugged cross on Calvary. Through the act of repentance and baptism, we are “reborn” as members of Christ’s Body, the Church.

While sin is a widespread reality and, at times, seems overwhelming, Wesley believed a capacity for acknowledging the reality of sin is in itself a gift of God. This gift from God of the ability to realize and acknowledge our own sins allows us to confess those sins and receive God’s Grace as absolution for those sins.

The goodness and forgiving Grace of God is so great that we need not try to hide from our sins, moral failures, and shortcomings. Guilt has an important role in restoring us to God. We should not hide from our guilt but instead confess it to God openly with an humble and contrite heart. Guilt is not simply an emotion, feeling bad about ourselves or about something we have done. Guilt is a state, the result of sin, and, very importantly, points to our sin. Thus, consciousness of guilt warns us to seek God and His forgiving Grace. Consciousness of guilt is actually a wonderful gift from God, coupled with God’s amazing and forgiving Grace.

Let us pray:

Great Shepherd of us all, who sent Thine only-begotten Son to die of a rugged cross for us, as an offering for the sins of the whole world, once and for all: Grant that we may continually examine our lives and continually seek Thy forgiving Grace; grant that we might not be tempted to hide from our guilt, but openly acknowledge our guilt, and seek Thy forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, Thine only Son, our Lord, our Saviour, and our Redeemer. *Amen.*

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² *Psalms and Lessons for the Church Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxx (PECUSA 1928/1943).

³ *Ecclesiasticus* 1:1-10 (KJV).