

SERMON FOR LAYREADERS

THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Brian McKee¹

First Lesson:²

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

“The Lord created man of the earth, and turned him into it again. He gave them few days, and a short time, and power also over the things therein. He endued them with strength by themselves, and made them according to his image, And put the fear of man upon all flesh, and gave him dominion over beasts and fowls. [They received the use of the five operations of the Lord, and in the sixth place he imparted them understanding, and in the seventh speech, an interpreter of the cogitations thereof.] Counsel, and a tongue, and eyes, ears, and a heart, gave he them to understand. Withal he filled them with the knowledge of understanding, and shewed them good and evil. He set his eye upon their hearts, that he might shew them the greatness of his works. He gave them to glory in his marvellous acts for ever, that they might declare his works with understanding. And the elect shall praise his holy name. Beside this he gave them knowledge, and the law of life for an heritage. He made an everlasting covenant with them, and shewed them his judgments. Their eyes saw the majesty of his glory, and their ears heard his glorious voice. And he said unto them, Beware of all unrighteousness; and he gave every man commandment concerning his neighbour. Their ways are ever before him, and shall not be hid from his eyes.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twentieth Verse of the third Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Mark.⁴

“. . . And the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself.

“ . . .

“There came then his brethren and his mother, and, standing without, sent unto him, calling him. And the multitude sat about him, and they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee. And he answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren? And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “And He looked round about on them which sat about Him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.”⁵

Homily:

Throughout the Gospel we find that Jesus saw the potential to be a disciple in many people who were shunned by society; like Levi, the tax collector. Jesus shattered the expectations of the Jewish people even further when He, and His disciples, became guests at the dinner table of Levi, the tax collector. Jesus saw potential in Levi, even though tax collectors were hated by the people and even though many

sued to be likely members of Christ's family; let us remember that Christ knows best and that He has a plan for their – and our -- lives.

Let us remember that: “God does not call the qualified. God qualifies those whom He calls.”

Let us pray:

Almighty and Ever-living God, who sent Thine only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, to call to Himself a “family of Christ”: enable us to welcome, with loving hearts, those whom Christ calls to be part of His family; enable to build each other up as members of the family of Christ; enable us to give our physical presence to both those who are physically sick and those who are spiritually sick; enable us all to do Thy holy will; Through Jesus Christ our Lord, the Great Physician of Souls. *Amen.*

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

³ *Ecclesiasticus* 17:1-15 (KJV).

⁴ St. Mark 3:20-21 & 31-35 (KJV).

⁵ St. Mark 3:34-35 (KJV).

tax collectors were known to be dishonest and to cheat the people in their tax collections.

Jesus was correct about Levi's potential: we now know Levi the tax collector by another name -- St. Matthew, and as the author of the first of the four Gospels and, therefore, of the first book of the New Testament.

In today's Second Lesson, Jesus said: “Behold my mother and brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.”

Here, Jesus teaches us that His followers are a family, indeed, that his “family of followers” is more important than His, or our, biological family. That family takes many forms: the Communion of Saints, being the saints of the past, the disciples in the process of becoming saints, and the saints of the future; our local church parish, or congregation; a religious order; a Bible study group; a church women's society or circle; a parish choir; and many other groups, and subgroups, of the family of God.

Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus chose to eat with, to fellowship with, and to call to be His disciples people, like Levi the tax collector, who were outcasts from society, who were on the margins of society, and who were the victims of snobbery and prejudice. Christ made it clear that people whom society considered not to be likely candidates for discipleship are often just those whom He chooses. This should teach to us that it is not we who regulate who will join Christ's family, or that we will not make up the guest list at the Master's feast. Christ will make His own guest list and He may surprise us with those whom He invites to join His family.

St. Augustine of Hippo is today regarded as one of the great Church Fathers but those who knew him in his younger life would certainly not have considered him a good

candidate for Christ's family. He indulged in relationships with women to whom he was not married and fathered a child out of wedlock. He was raised in paganism and long lived in disbelief. Yet, through the faithful prayers of his mother, St. Monica, Augustine eventually accepted Christ as his Saviour and Lord. He then turned his life around and the rest of the story is that today we know him as the great bishop, pastor, and theologian, St. Augustine of Hippo.

Jesus was a great physician. Jesus raised the dead. He healed the blind, the deaf, the paralyzed, lepers, and those who suffered from all kinds of ailments, illnesses, and diseases. But more importantly, Jesus was, and still is, the great physician of souls. Jesus taught us to catch the "fish" (the lost souls) and bring them into His family -- the Church. As someone once said, after we bring in the fish, He will clean them. Jesus will cure the illnesses of their souls through their acceptance of His prevenient, forgiving grace.

In our Anglican tradition, we are encouraged to be present with and minister to the sick. Jesus, the great physician, modeled this for us: His presence healed the sick. Thus we are encouraged physically to visit the sick, to minister to them with our prayers and presence. Anglicanism considers visiting the sick to be an act of piety, or a practice of grace, that helps us in the process of sanctification, or "going on to perfection."

On pages 308 to 320 in the 1928 BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, we find prayers and Psalms that we may use with those who are sick. These are prayers, except for a few which specify that they are only for a priest, that may be prayed by all members of the family of Christ when visiting the sick.

In addition, the physical presence of members of the family of Christ encourages the sick. In some instances, it actually enables the sick to be built up and restored to physi-

cal health but it can always help restore them to spiritual health. In this small way, we can assist Christ to "clean the fish" that we catch and bring those lost souls into Christ's family -- the Church.

For those who may not be able to travel, or visit the sick in person, much encouragement and help can be given by sending cards with a note of spiritual encouragement written on the card.

The Rev. Charles Wesley, Anglican priest and noted hymn writer, wrote this:

"Help us to help each other, Lord;
Each other's cross to bear.
Let each his friendly aid afford
And feel his brother's care.

"Help us to build each other up,
Our little stock improve;
Increase our faith, confirm our hope,
And perfect us in love.

"Up into Thee, our Living Head,
Let us in all things grow,
Till Thou hast made us free indeed
And spotless here below.

"Then when the mighty work is wrought,
Receive Thy ready Bride;
Give us in heaven a happy lot
With all the sanctified."

Let us all remember to build up each other as fellow members of the family of God. Let us remember Christ's example, and welcome all those that God will choose to bring into the family. Let us remember that even though they might not appear, to our imperfect, human eyes, to be