

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
The Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity²

Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the thirty-third Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel.⁴

“Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, speak to the children of thy people, and say unto them, When I bring the sword upon a land, if the people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman: If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people; Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning; his blood shall be upon him. But he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul. But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman’s hand.

“So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the thirty-seventh Verse of the twenty-fourth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.⁵

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

“But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

“... But as the days of Noe⁶ were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

“Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat

and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

When we first read or hear the words of today’s Second Lesson, they can seem a little more than upsetting. They can even be downright scary. These are some of the passages that plenty of folks use and have used to predict the time of Jesus’ Second Coming. A Doomsday prophecy and End of Days’ prediction can be constructed from them but, fortunately, in the Catholic churches we do not pick and choose texts from the Bible to formulate our own ideas on what Scripture means. We Catholic, or otherwise said, Universal, Christians use a liturgical cycle of lessons. These are lessons that have been set by the Church Universal for many, many years—in fact, in many cases, for more than a millenium.

In a liturgical cycle, we get to experience Christ as if we were living in the times that He was present on earth as a Man. We see His birth and all that knew Him from that point. We get to witness His miracles and His teachings. We are present at His death and Resurrection. We are His family and get to store in our hearts all of His life, lessons and miracles, like St. Luke reports the Blessed Virgin Mary did.

Today’s Second Lesson reminds us of what it means to live a Christian life and just what the ultimate purpose of that life is. Many times, especially when someone dies, we hear that although they may not have attended church much; or even at all, but still, the deceased lived what is described as “a good Christian life.”

Here is an interesting thought. A man can be a model husband, son, brother and friend. He can be honest and forthright, but Christianity does not necessarily have the market cornered on these traits. They are definite musts for a Christian, but anyone can be this way. It is even possible to live this way and claim to not be Christian or even a believer in any God.

In the two great Commandments in Jesus' Summary of the Law, this is the second one. The first is to love God with our whole heart, mind and soul. So yes, our conduct toward fellow man is important and necessary, but so is our conduct towards God. We are to worship and glorify Him. This is something that is done through our worship of Him. The essential part of Christian living is to worship God and look for His presence in the company of all of His children, with all the faithful believers.

Now let's look at some of the specifics of the Gospel message. As far as Christ's being solely in the desert or hidden away, Christians hold fast to the idea that Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father and that whenever two or more are gathered together in His name, He is present.

Think about this; is Christ like a lightning strike that can happen anywhere? I suppose an alternative question may answer this. Did the Son of God come as a quick flash of light and a clap of thunder and then disappear, or did He come as a light to the world, both gentile and Jew?

I believe that the answer to the second question is much more than sufficient. It is not in the character of the true believer to run off to somewhere every time someone says that Jesus is either just here or there. Only the simplest of minds would choose to believe that He can only be in one place at a time. God is limitless. He can do all things and is present in all things. We are warned not to be fooled by the evil one's claims that imply limitations on God.

By learning about and worshipping Him in the company of other believers, we learn how to show Him the respect that He deserves. We learn how to conduct ourselves with Him and with our fellow man. By knowing Him and all that He is, we are not enslaved by the belief that we should be running around searching for Him. This is why we are taught that it is right that we should, at all times and in all places, give Him thanks and praise.

With that said, here is a most proper ending: "To Him Be All Honor and Praise, World without End. Amen."

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The Rev'd George Parrish⁷
February 13, 2011

¹ "Any set of Psalms and Lessons appointed for the evening of any day may be read at the morning service, and any set of morning Psalms and Lessons may be read in the evening." *Concerning the Service of the Church*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² This sermon was originally written on the Gospel at Mass on the Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany, 2011.

³ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁴ Ezekiel 33:1-9 (KJV).

⁵ St. Matthew 24:37-end (KJV).

⁶ *I.e.*, Noah.

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