

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
Saint Simon and St. Jude (October 28)

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Priest Associate

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the thirty-second Chapter of the Fifth Book of Moses, called Deuteronomy.³

“Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass: Because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fifteenth Verse of the fourteenth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John.⁴

“If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Judas saith [SETH] unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe. Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."⁵

Homily:

Peace, as the world understands it, is essentially an absence of open conflict. If people are not attacking each other, even if they are merely avoiding each other, there is said to be peace. But the peace that Christ gives is much more than that. The peace that Christ gives is a positive transformation from hostility to reconciliation, from an adversarial relationship to a relationship of unity and mutuality, and most of all from chaos to order. The peace that Christ brings is the great SHALOM of God.

⁴ St. John 14:15-end (KJV).

⁵ St. John 14:27 (RSV).

⁶ Of course, in English the origins of the words "health", "wealth", and "wholeness" all share a common nexus of meanings.

glimpses of what Jesus and the Apostles and the prophets have seen and told us about.

Conclusion:

Every act of kindness, every sacrifice large or small for the good of others, every healing that takes place, every injustice that is rectified, every beautiful work of art or craftsmanship, every piece of harmonious music is an act of peacemaking and a manifestation of the children of God. Every time we show respect for the world of nature and accept responsibility for its preservation we show ourselves to be children of God. And when we honor God with our worship and with our obedience to his laws we proclaim the great SHALOM that was and that is and that is to come.

The Holy Spirit is given to us for that purpose, and Pentecost is just a small demonstration his power. The reconciling work of the Holy Spirit is closely linked with the atoning work of Christ.

So it is that Jesus is able to say as he prepares to go to the Cross: “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Let not your heart be troubled. Neither let it be afraid.”

—oo0oo—

St. David’s Anglican Church
Charlottesville, Virginia

May 10, 2008

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 *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xlv (PECUSA 1928), commonly called “the 1943 Lectionary”.

³ Deuteronomy 32:1-4 (KJV).

The basic or root meaning of the Hebrew word SHALOM is “wholeness”, “completeness”, or perhaps “perfection”. It can also mean “safety” or “health”,⁶ which are part of what it means to be whole, complete, intact, and in perfect order.

Jesus sometimes spoke Hebrew, although he usually spoke a closely related language known as Aramaic. I believe the Aramaic equivalent of SHALOM is SALAAM, but the meaning is the same. We learn from the Bible that God created the world in a state of SHALOM. He rested on the Sabbath day, not because He was tired but because there was nothing more to be done. Everything was perfect. Everything was in its proper place and was properly related to everything else. The world was in perfect order, and God pronounced it “good”.

But, as we all know, things began to fall apart when Adam and Eve and the serpent disrupted the order of things and attempted to move out of their respective places in the hierarchical structure that God had ordained. The immediate result was fragmentation.

Adam and Eve became alienated from each other and tried to hide their sexual differences. They also tried to hide from God. Enmity arose between them and the serpent, who represents the animal kingdom which they were supposed to rule and care for. The earth itself began to produce weeds and thorns as well as flowers and fruit. One of their sons, the fruit of their loins, murdered his brother. Not only humans but all the creatures on earth became subject to death. The great SHALOM of God was shattered. And what caused that shattering? Pride, arrogance, ambition, and rebellion against the one rule that God had given to preserve the state of wholeness and well-being.

I would suggest to you that these same sins are responsible for the fragmentation that still prevails in the world today. We are still in an adversarial relationship with nature. We are still in rebellion against the laws of God. We are still alienated from each other socially, politically, sexually, and even in the

Church, where the same arrogance, the same pride, the same ambition, have produced a plethora of denominational structures that divide rather than unite the Church. It seems that every little group that calls itself a church is more concerned with its own survival and prosperity than with the role it has to play in the great SHALOM of God. So we compete with each other more than we cooperate.

When the Second Person of the Holy Trinity laid aside the privileges of divinity and entered this fragmented world of creation, He set about restoring the state of wholeness and peace that He and the Father and the Spirit had created together. He healed the sick. He tamed the wind and the waves. He challenged and overcame death. He clarified the relationships that God intended to prevail among people as well as with Himself. He gathered a community and gave His Apostles the authority to bind and to loose, which is to say the authority to order and regulate the affairs of the Church, and He promised them the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity to help them.

Jesus says in the Beatitudes, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.” It is God alone who is blessed, and it is God alone who restores wholeness to His broken creation. But as a loving father allows his children to help him with his tasks, so God generously allows us to participate in the mending of broken relationships. St Paul says in Second Corinthians, “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself ... and hath committed to us the ministry of reconciliation.” To the extent that we accept and perform that ministry, we reveal that we are indeed God’s children. How then do we do that?

Well, for starters, Jesus commands us to love one another. That’s where we have to start. If we can’t love each other, we’re not much good. We are like the salt that Jesus spoke of that has lost its ability either to season or to preserve, and you know what Jesus says about that. It is good for nothing.

Jesus also commands us to present to every creature in the world the Good News of what He has done for the world. The Holy Spirit was given to the Church in order to enable us to do that. That’s just what the Spirit did on Pentecost. He enabled the Apostles to preach the Gospel to a diverse group of people, overcoming their linguistic and cultural differences and drawing them all together in the acceptance of that Gospel.

To the extent that we continue that work, we not only advance the peace of God among the people of the world, but in the world of nature as well.

The prophet Isaiah gives us a vision of that great SHALOM. He talks about converting weapons of war to peaceful uses, beating swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. And he also says this:

“The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
and the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.”

The world of nature can hardly wait for that. St Paul says in Romans, “The whole creation waits with eager longing for the manifestation of the children of God.” Manifestation means that something is already present but until now has been hidden. When the screen is removed, the veil is lifted, our eyes are opened and what has been there all along is revealed.

The peace of God remains hidden today by the sins of men. We know it is present because it has been given to us by Christ. We don’t see it because it is obscured and hindered by our sins. What we see instead is tyranny, conflict, corruption, and natural disasters. We see evil and disaster in the news every day. In our own lives and the lives of our family we see sickness and personal tragedy. But from time to time we are able to catch