

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
Saint Matthias (February 24)¹

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Priest-in-Charge

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-seventh Verse of the second Chapter of the First Book of Samuel, otherwise called the First Book of the Kings.³

“And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith [SETH] the LORD, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh’s [FAY-rose] house? And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel? Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people? Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith [SETH], I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith [SETH], Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father’s house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever. And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age. And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni [HAHFF-nye] and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them. And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fifteenth Verse of the seventh Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Matthew.⁴

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

“Not every one that saith [SETH] unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “Not everyone that saith [SETH] unto me, ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in hea-

ven.”⁵ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

The New Testament lesson for today is about false prophets. Such people have been a problem ever since religion began. The pagans had them. The Jews had them. The Muslims had them and still do. The Church had them in the time of Jesus Himself, and still has them today. They are called false prophets because they claim to speak on behalf of God, but really speak in behalf of themselves.

You can't tell them by the way they dress. Anybody can dress like a shepherd, or a priest. You can't tell them by what they say. They will tell you whatever it is that they think you want to hear. Once they have gained your trust, they will tell what they want you to do for them. That's when you can begin to recognize them.

How many television evangelists are out there pitching what they call their ministry and living high off the contributions of desperate and gullible people? How many clergy have taken advantage of their office to seduce young women and young boys? How many cults have been founded by Bible-quoting orators who lead their followers into compounds and poison their minds against their own families?

I don't believe that anyone here is likely to be taken in by such people. You are too sophisticated for that. But we are all victims of them nevertheless because they give religion a bad name and make the work of real evangelists and real priests and real prophets difficult.

Jesus assures us in the Gospel that such people will face God's Judgement. But meanwhile, we have to deal with them, and the best way to deal with them, I believe, is simply by our own good works.

“Not everyone that saith [SETH] unto me, ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” I don’t believe that Jesus is saying that good works will get you into heaven. But He is saying that what people do, and not what people say, is the window into their soul.

God Himself is willing have us see into His character by looking at His works. The creation tells us that He is a God of order. The deliverance of the Jews from Egypt tells us He is a God of compassion who pities the poor and opposes all who would victimize and oppress other people.

But there is something even more important about God that we can perceive by observing what He has done in the person of Jesus. He has shown that He loves us by living among us as one of us. He laid aside all the privileges of deity to do that. No other god has ever exhibited such humility.

In Jesus, God showed His compassion by shedding His human blood as the price of our deliverance from the demands of justice. He showed His willingness to share our pain by suffering pain Himself. He showed His power over death by entering fully into its grasp and then breaking free from it. In all these acts, God distinguished Himself from other deities who do not love us, and who sit in splendid isolation demanding tribute and punishing those who fail to offer it.

In the same way, we can distinguish ourselves from the false prophets and the pseudo religions by doing what we know is right and what reflects the character of the God we proclaim and serve. We can distinguish ourselves as the true children of God by dealing with each other as he has dealt with us.

We come here every week. We say the Creed. We sing the hymns. And the world pays no attention. When we go to work, when we go to school, when do whatever we do the rest of

the week, that’s when the world pays attention—not to what we say, but to what we do.

So Jesus says, “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” What a man says really doesn’t tell you much about him. It tells you what he wants you to think about him, but it doesn’t tell you what kind of man he really is. In order to learn that, you have to watch what he does.

The world may be fooled for a while by what a man says. But God is never fooled. And so Jesus says, “Not everyone that saith [SETH] unto me, ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”

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St. David’s Anglican Catholic Church
Charlottesville, Virginia

June 10, 2012

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Second Lesson for Morning Prayer on the First Sunday after Trinity, 2012.

² *Psalms and Lessons for the Fixed Holy Days* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xlv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ I Samuel 2:27-35 (KJV).

⁴ St. Matthew 7:15-27 (KJV).

⁵ St. Matthew 7:21 (KJV).