

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
The Fourth Sunday after Trinity¹

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

Lessons:

The First Lesson:² Here beginneth the twenty-second Verse of the third Chapter of the Lamentations of Jeremiah.³

“It is of the LORD’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, saith [SETH] my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him. He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope. He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach. For the LORD will not cast off for ever: But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson:⁴ Here beginneth the eighteenth Verse of the eighth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Romans.⁵

“... I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glo-

rious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

The first great theologians of the church were undoubtedly St. Paul and St. John. The parallels in their writings are striking, but so is the difference in their writing styles. St. John has a fluid and poetic style that relies heavily on narrative. St. Paul is a bit disjointed and certainly more prosaic. As a result, the great missionary and Apostle to the Gentiles can be a little hard to understand. But since fools rush in where angels fear to tread, I’m going to take on the Second Lesson for today.

The difficulty in this Epistle is compounded by the fact that St. Paul wrote it in Greek, but we read it in Jacobean English, and the English language has undergone some changes since the days of Queen Elizabeth and her successor, King James.

The word “creature” in modern usage conjures up images of an animal or maybe even some alien from another planet. But in the usage of the Prayer Book and the King James Bible, the word “creature” is sometimes used to refer to an inanimate object such as water or salt. In the Communion Service, for instance, the priest asks God’s blessing on the creatures of bread and wine. The word can also be used, as it is in today’s Epistle, to refer to the creation as a whole.

Now I have to be a little careful here because the primitive religion of Animism recognizes that everything in the world has life. Animists not only talk to trees and rocks and water and

fire but they also offer sacrifices to them as though they were gods. They worship the creature rather than the creator, as St. Paul says.

Animists also recognize that some forms of life are hostile, and they take measures to protect themselves from the evil spirits that inhabit various creatures. That leads to the practice of superstitious magic, which the Bible condemns. But there is an element of truth in this primitive religion.

God called the whole world into being by His Word and Holy Spirit, and the world continues to exist because God's life remains in it. The Psalms talk about rivers clapping their hands and valleys shouting and singing for joy before the Lord. Nevertheless, God has subjected the world to what the Apostle calls "vanity."

The basic meaning of "vanity" is emptiness, hollowness, or ineffectiveness. The world is empty, hollow, and ultimately impotent because it has been corrupted by sin—human sin--our sin. So Jesus says in John's Gospel, "The flesh is of no avail".

This all goes back to the Biblical concept of headship. Whatever happens to the head affects everything under its jurisdiction, whether for good or for ill. Adam and Eve were given dominion or headship over the rest of creation and, when they fell into sin, they brought the whole creation down with them.

You and I were born under the headship of Adam. We are given life and raised from the dead because we were born again under the headship of Christ. In Baptism we were taken up into the death and resurrection of Jesus. That is what St. Paul means when he says, "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

That redemption, that salvation, that deliverance from sin and death has already happened, but it is not yet apparent

that it has happened. We still seem to be mired in sin and subject to death.

We were created in the image of God. Our true nature is to be like Christ, the only begotten Son. But that nature is hidden beneath layers of sin. Baptism washed away the inherited sin that we call “original sin”, but sins keep accumulating again and again as long as we live in this world, so our true nature as children of God remains hidden.

There is a day coming when this covering of sin, which St. Paul calls “sarx” and is usually translated as “flesh”, will be completely and finally removed. On that day our nature as “sons of God” will be made manifest for all to see. So we are waiting anxiously, groaning within ourselves, as he says, for the redemption of our body.

The word “manifestation” in the Second Lesson means the revealing or uncovering of something that is present but hidden and suppressed. As we wait in earnest expectation for our manifestation as children of God, the whole creation waits in earnest expectation with us.

St. John the Divine writes in Revelation about a new heaven and a new earth. The prophet Isaiah envisions a return to Eden where carnivorous animals become vegetarians and all creatures live side by side in peace. Such visions are what St. Paul has in mind when he says, “The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us.”

Such is the hope in which we live as we wait for the appearance of our Lord in glory and the revelation of our own true nature. This is the promise that Jesus made when He said, “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself.”

The pledge of that promise is the gift of The Holy Spirit, of whom Jesus says in the Fourth Gospel that He shall guide us into all truth. St. Paul says that the Spirit is “the first fruits”. Both men are telling us that there is much more to come, and The Holy Spirit is here to tide us over, as it were, until the final day of glory arrives.

The Collect for the Day is intended to summarize the theme of the day and give a clue to the interpretation of the readings. It is with that prayer that I conclude:

O GOD, the protector of all that trust in thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy; Increase and multiply upon us thy mercy; that, thou being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal. Grant this, O heavenly Father, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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St. David’s Anglican Catholic Church
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¹ This sermon was originally written on the Epistle at Mass for the Fourth Sunday after Trinity, 2012.

² *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxviii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ Lamentations 3:22-33 (KJV).

⁴ “Upon any Sunday or Holy Day, the Minister may read the Epistle or the Gospel of the Day in place of the Second Lesson at Morning or Evening Prayer.” *Concerning the Service of the Church*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁵ Romans 8:18-23 (KJV).