

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
EMBER WEDNESDAY AFTER WHITSUNDAY

THE REV'D WARREN E. SHAW, SUPPLY PRIEST²

Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the ninth Verse of the ninth Chapter of the Wisdom of Solomon.⁴

“... And wisdom was with thee: which knoweth thy works, and was present when thou madest the world, and knew what was acceptable in thy sight, and right in thy commandments. O send her out of thy holy heavens, and from the throne of thy glory, that being present she may labour with me, that I may know what is pleasing unto thee. For she knoweth and understandeth all things, and she shall lead me soberly in my doings, and preserve me in her power. ... And thy counsel who hath known, except thou give wisdom, and send thy Holy Spirit from above? For so the ways of them which lived on the earth were reformed, and men were taught the things that are pleasing unto thee, and were saved through wisdom.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twelfth Verse of the fifth Chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.⁵

“And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon’s porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.) Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.

“Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within. Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow. Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people. Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

God grant that the priest you call will be a man to be Rector here who can form you and maintain you as a community of healing. God grant that every one of you will be able to say with confidence to anyone and everyone, “Come with us and we will do thee good.”

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St. Alban’s Anglican Catholic Church
Richmond, Virginia

August 24, 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 Priest Associate, St. David’s Anglican Catholic Church, Charlottesville, Virginia.

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

⁴ *Wisdom* 9:9-11, 17-18 (KJV).

⁵ Acts 5:12-28 (KJV).

⁶ Acts 5:16 (RSV).

Homily:

What is it that makes sick people whole? Is it medicine? Sometimes. Is it surgery? Sometimes. Is it therapy, either physical or psychological? Sometimes. Is it relationships? Yes, all the time. Wholeness can be defined as having all components in the right relationship with each other. In medicine that means bodily parts. In psychiatry it means mental components. In life it means all components, physical, mental, spiritual and environmental, in right relationships with each other.

We don’t hear much about “bedside manner” anymore when we talk about doctors, but wise doctors know that their relationship with the patient has great healing power in itself, entirely apart from any medicine or any surgical procedure. Psychological counselors, of course, depend entirely upon their relationship with their clients.

Today’s Second Lesson talks about how the Apostles were able to heal those who were brought to them in broken condition. Some were made whole simply by being in the shadow of St. Peter. That is reminiscent of the woman who reached out to touch the hem of the robe of Jesus as He passed by, and of the people who sought contact with handkerchiefs and other items that had come in contact with St. Paul.

The phenomenon is also related to the healing power of relics of saints that people make pilgrimages in order to touch. These relics and other items, like Peter’s shadow and the hem of Our Lord’s robe and St. Paul’s handkerchiefs, are all symbolic of the people to whom they belong. By touching them there is some kind of relationship established, however, remote, with those people.

More than once Jesus sent His Apostles out with instructions to heal the sick, drive out demons, and preach repentance. I believe all three of those activities are related. Repentance brings us into a right relationship with God, and I note that more than

once Jesus healed people by pronouncing the forgiveness of their sins.

I am not suggesting that we all become Christian Scientists and refuse to make use of the marvelous advancements of modern medicine. St. Paul, after all, traveled with St. Luke as his personal physician. The Apostle even prescribed a little wine with dinner as an aid to digestion. The book of Ecclesiasticus says that a physician is to be honored and his knowledge made use of because it all comes from God. It says the same of the pharmacist who dispenses the medicine. God has given us tools for healing, and we should make use of all of them.

But we must not overlook the power that we ourselves have as an apostolic community to contribute to the healing of people who are suffering from all kinds of disorder in their lives, both physical and spiritual. We can help such people by listening to them, understanding them, loving them, and sharing our own experiences with them. Most of all we can help them by sharing with them the Good News of salvation, forgiveness, and renewal of life that is available through Jesus Christ. To know Him and believe in Him as Savior and as Lord is the beginning of the long process that restores us to right relations with God, with other people, and within our own hearts and minds and bodies and souls.

This Lesson is also the Epistle appointed to be read at Mass on St. Bartholomew's Day on the Church calendar. We don't know much about that particular Apostle except that he was one of the original Twelve Apostles chosen by Jesus to carry on His work in the world after His Ascension. We know that preaching and healing were part of that work.

We also know that Bartholomew is a Jewish surname. It means "Son of Ptolemy". Many people think that this man's first name was Nathaniel because of the close association with Philip. It was Philip, you will recall, who brought Nathaniel to Jesus.

Nathaniel Bartholomew was presumably with the other Apostles who appear in today's Second Lesson, standing on Solomon's porch in the temple, preaching about Jesus and healing all who were brought to them by the power of the Word of God entrusted to them. There is a tradition that has Bartholomew preaching in India, which is generally thought to have been St. Thomas's territory. A somewhat stronger tradition has him carrying the Gospel to Armenia, where he was skinned alive for his trouble. But knowing that Jesus chose him as an Apostle and sent him into the world to preach and to teach and to baptize and to drive out demons and to heal the sick may be all we need to know.

As Anglicans we consider ourselves an apostolic community, connected to Jesus through our Bishops who are successors to the Apostles and through the Holy Scriptures that were given to us by the Apostles, and through the Sacraments that were likewise passed down to us through the Apostles and their successors. We need to honor that apostolic heritage by offering people the kind of healing that the Apostles offered – the healing that comes through reestablishing right relationships with God and with each other.

John Wesley, a great Anglican priest, used to say "Come with us and we will do thee good." What he meant was that the lives of broken people would be much improved by associating with his followers, participating one of the "classes" as he called them, and establishing relations with others who knew that their sins were forgiven, people whose own lives were broken and were made whole, people who shared their struggles, wept with those who failed, and rejoiced with those who succeeded.

When I was in charge of a parish, it was the major goal of my ministry to shape my parish into such a community. I'm not happy with the degree to which I succeeded, but I am grateful for those times when God was able to use that parish as an instrument of healing. I will be happy, and Jesus will be happy, if he is able to use this parish in the same way.