

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
The Second Sunday in Lent

The Reverend Warren E. Shaw, Priest Associate

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the thirty-seventh Verse of the eighth Chapter of the First Book of the Kings, commonly called the Third Book of the Kings.²

“If there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust, or if there be caterpillar; if their enemy besiege them in the land of their cities; whatsoever plague, whatsoever sickness there be; What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house: Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men;) That they may fear thee all the days that they live in the land which thou gavest unto our fathers. Moreover concerning a stranger, that is not of thy people Israel, but cometh out of a far country for thy name’s sake; (For they shall hear of thy great name, and of thy strong hand, and of thy stretched out arm;) when he shall come and pray toward this house; Hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for: that all people of the earth may know thy name, to fear thee, as do thy people Israel; and that they may know that this house, which I have builded, is called by thy name.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twelfth Verse of the third Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Colossians.³

“... Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Body:

This congregation, like the people of Israel, came out from a place that offered a degree of security but required the acceptance of what we considered unacceptable. Since that time we, like the Jews, have lived like nomads, worshiping God for years in temporary facilities.

The people of Israel had to take the tabernacle apart, carry it with them, and set it up again every time they moved. It is even more inconvenient for us. We have to set everything up and take it down every week, and we can only use the facilities on Sundays. But that is about to change for us, as it did for the Jews.

This morning's Old Testament lesson is taken from the prayer offered by King Solomon at the dedication of the first permanent house of worship that the Israelites were able to build. We won't be able to dedicate our house of worship for a while yet, but when we do, you may hear this sermon, or something like it again.

It is a good thing to have a building set apart for the worship of God. But there is also a certain danger in that. The danger is that, having invested so much hope in that place, we may come to believe that God is somehow confined there. We all know people who are unable to look for God anywhere other than the place in which their families worshiped for generations. They cling to old memories and old relationships even after God has written “Ichabod”, “The glory has departed,” over the door.

In a part of Solomon’s prayer that is not included in this morning’s reading, he says, “Heaven and the highest of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have built.”

The Jews knew perfectly well that God had been with them in all their wanderings. They had seen His glory leading and protecting them in the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud. They had felt His power sustaining them in their trials and in their battles, just as we have felt His power among us in our struggles. They knew that God could not be confined to any particular place. And yet the temple meant even more to the Jews than our new church will mean to us.

The temple was a place to meet and to learn from the scholars who lectured and debated there. You may recall that Jesus as a child, when he was taken to Jerusalem, stayed behind when the family left and was found in the temple listening to the lectures and asking questions of the scholars. As an adult he himself taught in the temple precincts and engaged other teachers in debate.

I doubt many scholars will appear in our new building and hold forth there, but it will be a place where people can come for Bible study and other instruction in the faith.

The temple was a place to offer sacrifices. For us, the sacrifice of the Mass, however you may understand that, will be offered not only on Sundays but on other holy days as well in our new facility.

For the Jews of Solomon's day, the temple was supremely the vehicle through which they had access to God and through which their prayers were conveyed to his throne in heaven.

Listen again to the portion of Solomon's prayer that is included in the First Lesson:

“Whatever prayer, whatever supplication is made by any man or by all the people of Israel *stretching out his hands toward this house*; then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive and act.”

“Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of thy people, Israel, ... when he comes and *prays toward this house*, hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and do all that for which the foreigner calls thee.”

The temple was a kind of conduit through which prayers found their way to heaven.

Our prayers will also ascend to heaven when we gather in our new building, but the building will not be the vehicle through which they are brought before God. It is through Jesus that our prayers ascend to the throne of God, and so it is that wherever we are we pray “in the name of Jesus.”

The Jews considered the temple to be the place on earth that was called by God's name and the place wherein His honor dwelt. But they did not have Jesus. The temple was a precursor, as the author of Hebrews argues, a shadow of things to come. The temple was really as temporary as the tabernacle, to

be replaced when Christ, the true temple came down from heaven.

It is in Jesus that, as St Paul says, “all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell”. “We have beheld his glory,” as St. John says. It is through Jesus that, as St. Paul says again, we have access to the grace of God.

Jesus has been with us right here in this uninspiring place and will be with us in our new place as well. When we get there, we must remember that it is in Him, and not in any building, that we find our salvation and our strength and our access to the Father.

In the 42nd psalm and the 43rd psalm, when the psalmist was unable to go to the temple, he was deeply grieved and felt isolated from God. We are never isolated from God as long as we turn to Jesus. Still, it will be good to worship Him in a building dedicated to His honor. By the grace of God it will soon be so.

—oo0oo—

St. David's Anglican Catholic Church
Charlottesville, Virginia

February 28, 2010

¹ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xvii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² I Kings 8:37-43 (KJV).

³ Colossians 3:12-17 (KJV).