

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
St. Mark, Apostle and Evangelist¹

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

The Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the sixth Verse of the sixty-second Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.³

“... I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence, And give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth. The LORD hath sworn by his right hand, and by the arm of his strength, Surely I will no more give thy corn to be meat for thine enemies; and the sons of the stranger shall not drink thy wine, for the which thou hast laboured: But they that have gathered it shall eat it, and praise the LORD; and they that have brought it together shall drink it in the courts of my holiness.

“Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people. Behold, the LORD hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. And they shall call them, The holy people, The redeemed of the LORD: and thou shalt be called, Sought out, A city not forsaken.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fourth Verse of the fifteenth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Romans.⁴

“... For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another ac-

ording to Christ Jesus: That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God. Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name. And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people. And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people. And again, Esaias⁵ [**ee-ZAY-uss**] saith [**SETH**], There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust. Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “[W]hatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

Since the gospels were not written until after St. Paul had completed his work, and since it never occurred to the Apostle that the letters he was writing would one day become Holy Scripture, it is clear that the “Scriptures” referred to are the Jewish Bible, or what we call The Old Testament. It is from those Scriptures that we derive the patience and comfort that we need in the difficult times in which we live.

But that patience and that comfort are only given to those who, as the Collect says, “read, mark, learn and inwardly digest

⁴ Romans 15:4-13 (KJV).

⁵ *I.e.*, Isaiah.

⁶ Romans 15:4 (KJV).

⁷ Isaiah 11:10 (RSV).

⁸ Romans 15:8-9a (KJV).

them”. You can’t just pass over these books with a cursory reading and expect to get anything out of them. You can’t dismiss them as outdated or as superseded by the New Testament. They are the foundation on which the New Testament is based, and you can’t understand the New apart from the Old.

All of the Apostles knew that and used quotations from the Jewish Scriptures to buttress their arguments and proclamations. Jesus knew it too, and said that these books which the Jews call Holy Scripture are the very books that testify of Him.

One of the things we learn from a serious reading of the Old Testament is that God fulfills His promises. That is the basis of the hope we have for the future. But the basis for our patience is the realization that it is in God’s own time and God’s own way that His promises are fulfilled. Let’s look, for example, at a few of those promises.

In the Garden of Eden, God says to the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.” That promised was fulfilled thousands of years later when Jesus was born of a woman and was bruised by the forces of evil in His day and then rose from the dead to crush the power of sin and death.

In the calling of Abraham, God promised three things: that Abraham would have countless descendants; that his descendants would occupy the Promised Land; and that all the families of the Earth would be blessed in him.

None of those promises was fulfilled in Abraham’s lifetime, but look where we are today. The spiritual descendants of Abraham, by which I mean Christians, Jews, and Muslims, are more than can be counted, especially if you consider those who lived before us.

The Jews conquered the Promised Land under Joshua a thousand years after Abraham lived, and, although they were driven out and brought back more than once, they occupy the land today along with the Arabs, who are also descendants of Abraham.

The third promise to Abraham is the one that really took a long time to be fulfilled, and is still not completely fulfilled: “The Gentiles shall come to thy light,” says, the psalmist, “and kings to the brightness of thy rising.” St Matthew points to the fulfillment of that promise in the visit of the Magi, long after the psalmist was dead.

The prophet Isaiah said, “There shall be a root of Jesse that shall stand as an ensign to the people: him shall the Gentiles seek, and his dwellings shall be glorious.”⁷ The prophet never saw that promise fulfilled, but we see it fulfilled every Sunday right here.

It was not until after the death and resurrection of Jesus, however, that the Apostles carried the Gospel to the ends of the earth and brought the Gentiles into the family of Abraham. We are the fruit of their labors, and the work is not complete, but “through patience and comfort of the scriptures we have hope.”

Are you beginning to see a pattern here?

St. Paul says in the Second Lesson for today, “Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.”⁸

Now think about that. It was circumcision that brought Jews into the covenant with Abraham. It is Christ who brings us into that covenant, not by circumcision but by baptism; not by obedience to the law but by the free gift of grace mediated through Himself. He did that so that we might join with our Jewish brothers and sisters in glorifying God. They glorify Him for

the gift of the law. We glorify Him for the gift of mercy. But the God that we glorify is one and the same, and the hope we share, which is the hope of all the children of Abraham, is supported by our shared history. God fulfills His promises.

God has promised some things that He has yet to deliver. The book of Revelation speaks of a new heaven and a new earth “where sorrow and pain are no more, neither sighing but life everlasting.” It speaks of a new Jerusalem where no evil thing may enter. The Gospel of John promises a home with many rooms eternal in the heavens for the faithful. The Epistles speak of the manifestation of the sons of God, a manifestation in which the whole creation shares, even as Isaiah predicted in his famous vision of universal peace, even among animals. Those promises still await fulfillment. But through patience and comfort of the scriptures we have hope.

God’s record is impeccable. So let us pray the Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent which, as a result, is sometimes called “Bible Sunday”:

“Blessed Lord who has caused all holy scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.”

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¹ This sermon was originally written for Holy Communion on the Second Sunday in Advent.

² THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xliv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ Isaiah 62:6-end (KJV).