

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
THE TRANSFIGURATION (AUGUST 6)

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Priest Associate

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twelfth Verse of the twenty-fourth Chapter of the Second Book of Moses, called Exodus.³

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Come up to me into the mount, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them. And Moses rose up, and his minister Joshua: and Moses went up into the mount of God. And he said unto the elders, Tarry ye here for us, until we come again unto you: and, behold, Aaron and Hur are with you: if any man have any matters to do, let him come unto them. And Moses went up into the mount, and a cloud covered the mount. And the glory of the LORD abode upon mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days: and the seventh day he called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud. And the sight of the glory of the LORD was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel. And Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount: and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the thirteenth Verse of the third Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Philippians.⁴

“... Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in

any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing. Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.) For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “Jesus Christ will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him to subdue all things to himself.”⁵ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

What is this power that enables Jesus to subdue all things to himself? It is the power of God. But how does that power work, and especially how does it work in Jesus? That is the question that many theologians, beginning with St. Paul, have endeavored to answer.

St. Paul was very familiar with what we call “The Old Testament”. Even though he lived outside the Holy Land and studied the Greek philosophers and poets, even using their vocabulary, his thinking was clearly shaped by his Jewish heritage. Let us look at what that heritage reveals.

⁶ Isaiah 35:1, 5-7 (RSV).

The Bible begins with the story of how God created the world out of nothing. His breath blew over the dark chaotic void and, when His Word entered in, an orderly universe emerged. The power of God is revealed from the beginning as the ability to transform nothing into something.

That power is again revealed in the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and Sarah. The promise was that this old couple, who had never been able to have children, would have so many descendants that no one would be able to count them.

Sarah laughed when she heard that because her ovaries had long since dried up, but God fulfilled His promise by once again bringing something out of nothing. Later, when some of Abraham's descendants were living in Egypt as slaves, God brought them out of their bondage, led them to the promised land, and shaped them into what became a great and prosperous nation, culminating in the golden age of Solomon.

But just as the sin of man ruined the original creation, so the sinfulness of Israel brought about the downfall and conquest of their nation. The Jews were overrun by foreigners and dispersed throughout the world. Their leaders were executed, their temple was destroyed, and their capital city was reduced to rubble. Once again, there was chaos and emptiness and void.

So God set about once again to bring something out of nothing. He raised up another military power to destroy the empire that held the Jews in exile. That power freed God's people to return to the Holy Land and rebuild the temple. Israel would never again be as powerful and prosperous as it had once been, but the power of God to bring something out of nothing was hailed by the prophet Isaiah:

“The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;

...

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,

and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then shall the lame man leap like a hart,
and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy.
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;
the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water....”⁶

Do you see a pattern here? Do you see that pattern replicated in the ministry of the One Who began building His church by calling tradesmen, fishermen, and tax collectors to be His disciples rather than the elite and well-to-do?

St. Paul says, “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that do not exist, to abolish things that do exist.” That is why the Apostle insists on the centrality of the crucifixion of Christ in the drama of salvation.

The cross represents nothingness. It means oblivion. It means death. It means a return to chaos. It means dishonor and disgrace. It means a total lack of any kind of power that we can understand. So the Apostle says, “The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.”

So Jesus is raised from the dead by the power of God, and the crucified one becomes the exalted one. It is precisely because He was made low that He is made high. It is because he emptied Himself of his divine prerogatives that He is now able to subdue all things to Himself.

The power of God is the power to make something out of nothing, and that is the power we see at work in the cross of Christ.

By that same power Christ will one day change your lowly body to be like His own glorious body. That is the power that can

fill the void in every human life and bring order out of the present chaos. That same power can bring every one of us from bondage to freedom, from sin to righteousness, from ignorance to truth, from death to life. That same power, if you will allow it, will transform you from a nobody in this world to an heir of the kingdom of God.

It is the will of God that every one here should become a vehicle through which the transforming power of God is revealed. Adam was such a vehicle when God first created him out of dust. But it is the second Adam, the crucified one, through whom the power of God is supremely revealed.

If you want that power in your life, you need to offer yourself as Jesus offered Himself: in your impotence, in your poverty, in your shame. Give God something He can work with. Give Him nothing. That is what God has consistently chosen to work with, and that is what He can work with in your life if you offer it to Him.

Thus it is written: “Jesus Christ will change [your] lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him to subdue all things to himself.”

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St. David's Anglican Catholic Church
Charlottesville, Virginia

November 15, 2009

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

³ Exodus 24:12-end (KJV).

⁴ Philippians 3:13-end (KJV).

⁵ Philippians 3:21.