

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity

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

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the forty-fifth Chapter of the First Book of Moses, called Genesis.²

“Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren. And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard. And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence. And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith [SETH] thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not: And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children’s children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast: And there will I nourish thee; for yet there are five years of famine; lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty. And, behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you. And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen; and ye shall

haste and bring down my father hither. And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them: and after that his brethren talked with him.

“... ”

“And they went up out of Egypt, and came into the land of Canaan [**KAY-nunn**] unto Jacob their father, And told him, saying, Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt. And Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not. And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said unto them: and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived: And Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

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

“... Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith [**SETH**] the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of

⁴ Romans 12:21 (RSV).

⁵ Romans 12:9b-15 (RSV).

⁶ Romans 12:21 (RSV).

fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”⁴ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

The list of evil forces that conspired to bring about the death of Jesus is impressive: political intrigue, the distortion of His words, outright lying, jealousy, fear, greed, betrayal, the cowardice of a public official in the face of a lynch mob—these are all evil.

But was Jesus overcome by them? He was not. He says in St. John’s Gospel, “Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” And the word that is used there is the same word that St. Paul uses in today’s lesson. It means to be defeated. It means to be subdued.

Jesus was not defeated or subdued by the evil forces arrayed against Him. “No man takes my life from me,” He said, “I lay it down of my own accord.” He used the evil arrayed against Him to bring Him into death in order to overcome it.

Jesus rose from the dead by the power of God. He sits in glory at the right hand of the Father. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him. He holds the keys that lock and unlock the gates of Hell. He comes to us when we gather in His name, and makes Himself present in the bread and wine with which our souls are fed. It is the crucified One who has overcome evil and not the other way around.

I need not remind you, however, that evil still exists in the world. We encounter evil every day in one form or another, and in this morning's Second Lesson the Apostle says that we must not submit to it. We must not allow the evil we encounter to defeat us and subdue us. We must overcome it, and we must overcome it with good.

That's how Jesus did it. That's how Paul did it. That's how all the martyrs did it.

Jesus was tempted in the wilderness to employ the ways of the world to overcome the world. He refused. He chose instead to employ the ways that St. Paul outlines in the Second Lesson that was read in your hearing this morning:

“... [H]ate what is evil; hold fast to what is good... be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints [by which the Apostle means your fellow Christians], practice hospitality.

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.”⁵

By such means did Jesus overcome evil with good, and, in the Sermon on the Mount, taught us do the same. St. Paul is echoing his Master, and urging us to follow His example. “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

We are tempted to retaliate in kind when someone does us harm. But retaliation does not overcome evil; it perpetuates it. Coercion does not overcome evil. The best coercion can do is restrain evil; and that's the job of government.

There is a difference between justice and revenge, and that line becomes blurred when we take it upon ourselves to pass judgment on other people and administer punishment. The objective nature of justice becomes contaminated by our own emotions.

You cannot beat the devil at his own game, and when you resort to political intrigue, gossip, lying, jealousy, intimidation, greed, betrayal, cowardice, you are playing his game. You have acknowledged that evil is stronger than good. You have turned to the devil for help and made use of his resources. When you do that the devil laughs because he knows he has won. You have made a Faustian bargain. Even if you win, you lose, because evil will have prevailed, and you will have submitted to it.

Listen to Jesus. Use His methods. Follow the way of the Cross, for that is ultimately the way of life. Listen to St. Paul: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

That injunction comes with a promise, and with that promise I will close.

If you do what Jesus and His Apostle say to do, and follow the example that they set, you will overcome the evil in your life, just as they overcame the evil in theirs. You may be scorned by men, as they were, but you will receive the approval of God, as they did. You will be called a child of God. You will be given a place of honor in the kingdom of God. You will receive eternal life and a share in the glory of Christ.

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”⁶

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St. David's Anglican Catholic Church
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¹ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² Genesis 45:1-15, 25-28 (KJV).

³ Romans 12:9-end (KJV).