

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
THE FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Priest Associate

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-first Verse of the second Chapter of Joel.³

“Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things. Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig tree and the vine do yield their strength. Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you. And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed. And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-fourth Verse of the sixth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Matthew.⁴

“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Be-

hold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”⁵
In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

The Second Lesson today confronts us with a choice. Will it be God? Or will it be *mammon*? It can't be both.

In this passage from the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord tells us not to worry. He tells us specifically not to worry about three things that are rather important. Do not worry about food. Do not worry about clothing. Do not worry about tomorrow.

⁵ St. Matthew 6:33.

We do need to think about those things because we have to make plans and we have to make decisions. But thinking is one thing; worrying is something else. The difference, I think, is the context in which we make those plans and those decisions.

I would like to suggest to you this morning that anxiety grows out of being drawn in two directions at once. We get anxious when we are undecided about which direction to take, which choice to make, or which objective to pursue. Where should we invest our money and our time and our energy? Whose friendship should we cultivate and whose company should we keep? How should we react when people ignore us, or insult us, or betray us? We are confronted every day by a host of such decisions, and we are going to agonize over every one of them until we make a fundamental decision and a fundamental commitment about the overall direction of our life and whether we are going to serve God or serve *mammon*.

Jesus says, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” Make the big decision. Commit yourself to the service of God and the pursuit of His values and purposes for the world, and then the little decisions will follow.

Because God has endowed all of us with free will, you do have an alternative. Instead of committing yourself to God’s will and purposes, you can choose instead to devote your life to the pursuit of worldly goods and worldly values. Either way you choose, you still have to think about how you are going to feed and cloth yourself and your family. Either way, you still have to think about how to prepare for whatever tomorrow may bring. But since the master you choose to serve becomes responsible for your welfare, the question resolves itself to a matter of trust. In whom do you put your trust? Do you choose to entrust your welfare to God or to the wealth of this world? Which will it be?

I find it ironic that the words “In God we trust” appear on our money. They may not appear there much longer because the

ACLU is determined to have them removed. But it almost seems as though the founding fathers intended to warn us that we could not really trust our money. If you are paying attention to what has been happening to the dollar on the international market, it appears that the founding fathers were giving good advice. God is always faithful. God always delivers on His promises, and He always takes care of those who trust in Him. The same cannot be said for our money.

I have to say here that *mammon* is not evil. *Mammon* is not even a person. *Mammon* is simply an Aramaic word that means *riches* or *wealth*. *Mammon* is a gift of God. As such it has a proper place in the order of things and should be used, like all of God's gifts, in accordance with the will and intentions of God. *Mammon* can be used, and should be used, to build relationships -- relationships that endure in this world and the next. Jesus himself said, "Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous *mammon*, so that **when it fails**, they [those friends you have made with your wealth] may receive you into the eternal habitations."

By calling *mammon* "unrighteous", Jesus does not mean that it is evil. It is simply not righteous. It has no morality in itself. The evil comes in when it is not properly used or when relationships are sacrificed in order to attain it.

The definition of idolatry is to put what God has created in the place of God Himself, and it is the most the most commonly mentioned sin and the most severely condemned sin in the Bible. The first of the Ten Commandments is "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me." St. Paul talks about the foolishness of men who worship and serve the creature rather than the creator, and since God is the Creator of all material things, whoever chooses to serve *mammon* rather than God is a fool and an idolater.

"No man can serve two masters", says Jesus. We all have to make a choice. You cannot serve both God and *mammon*.

One of them has to give way to the other, and whichever one you choose will determine the context in which you will make all the little decisions that we all have to make every day.

You will always be anxious until you make the fundamental decision about how to invest your life. Until you make that critical decision you will always be torn in two directions. You will be like someone trying to ride two horses at once, or trying to chase two rabbits running in different directions. You will have to struggle with every little decision about where to invest or spend your money, where to invest or spend your time and your energy, whose friendship to cultivate and whose company to keep, how to react when people ignore you, or insult you, or betray you. How to prioritize and respond to all the demands and requests for your time, your energy, and your resources.

All those little decisions are made in the context of the one big decision that gives them their ultimate meaning. Who stands in the place of God? A creature or the Creator? In whom do you put your trust?

"You cannot serve God and *mammon*." Open your wallet and read what your money itself says. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

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St. David's Anglican Catholic Church
Charlottesville, Virginia

August 31, 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 *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ Joel 2:21-27 (KJV).

⁴ St. Matthew 6:24-end (KJV).