

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Priest Associate

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the eighth Verse of the fourth Chapter of the Second Book of the Kings, commonly called the Fourth Book of the Kings.³

“And it fell on a day, that Elisha [**ee-LYE-shuh**] passed to Shunem [**SHOE-nemm**], where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither. And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there. And he said to Gehazi [**ghih-HAZE-eye**] his servant, Call this Shunammite [**SHOE-nemm-ight**]. And when he had called her, she stood before him. And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among mine own people. And he said, What then is to be done for her? And Gehazi [**ghih-HAZE-eye**] answered, Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old. And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door. And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid. And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha [**ee-LYE-shuh**] had said unto her, according to the time of life.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twelfth Verse of the fourteenth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Luke.⁴

“Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.

“And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God. Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “Come; for all things are now ready.”⁵ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

This parable, in the end, is about priorities. We have ours; God has His. An alternative translation to “compel” is “constrain”, and we are constrained to come to the feast. We are also constrained to bring all our priorities into conformity with His.

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St. David's Anglican Catholic Church
Charlottesville, Virginia

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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 xxvii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ II Kings 4:8-17 (KJV).

⁴ St. Luke 14:12-24 (KJV).

⁵ St. Luke 14:17b (KJV).

ones singing on key. “She could see by their shocked and altered faces that even their virtues were being burned away.”

Flannery O’Conner was a good Catholic, and when she wrote that story she may have had in mind something that Jesus said to the chief priests and elders of his day: “Tax collectors and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.”

So, in the parable, the servants of the master went as they were told and rounded up the outcasts of society. But even then, the hospitality of God was not exhausted. The servant says to the master, “Lord, it is done and yet there is room.” So God sent His servants out to round up everybody they could find wherever they could find them.

St. Paul was one of those He sent to the far reaches of the world to invite the Gentiles to come and be part of God’s kingdom on earth. “Compel them to come in,” said the master — not by physical force, of course, but by persuasion and by irrefutable evidence that God is at work in the Church and in the person bearing witness to God’s love.

The Apostle traveled the world, first engaging the diaspora Jews in theological debate, and then explaining to the Gentiles what God had done for the whole world as well as in the Apostle’s own life. His message was centered on the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, because that was the event that liberated the world from the great Satan and the clutches of death that flow from that reign.

Conclusion:

It is still the will of God that His house shall be filled. “Yet there is room.” There is room for us. There is room for everyone regardless of his or her station in life. There will always be room because the grace and hospitality of God are without bounds and beyond limits.

Homily:

Today’s Second Lesson is about priorities. It includes an announcement: “Come; for all things are now ready.” This is the gracious invitation that God extends to the people He has chosen to inaugurate His rule on earth. Those people are the Jews.

The guests of honor at this inaugural banquet are to be the priests, the scribes, the leaders of the Jewish people, but, as the story unfolds, we see that they are not the only ones who are to be part of the great celebration. It has taken the host a long time to prepare for this moment. It has taken centuries. But, finally, the Messiah, He who is to overthrow the evil one, has entered the world to inaugurate the righteous rule of God. So Jesus begins His ministry in St. Mark’s Gospel with these words: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.”

This is the announcement for which the world, and especially the Jews, have been waiting. But the guests of honor are all preoccupied with worldly affairs — business transactions, new purchases, family obligations. Those are not evil activities, but they are being given a higher priority than they deserve. The people involved with them do not seem to realize the importance of that in which they are being called to participate.

That’s not hard to understand. Most people today have the same priorities. They see church attendance as an essentially social activity — an opportunity to come together with friends and enjoy each other’s company — a chance to catch up with what’s going on in people’s lives. That’s a good thing to do, but it’s not as important as business affairs or family affairs, and its not as much fun as trying out a new barbecue grill or a new boat. So people think.

I don’t want to suggest that any of you feel that way. After all, you are here. But it might be worthwhile to ask yourself why you are here rather than somewhere else on this fine day. Is it be-

cause you place a higher value on the social and community aspects of church than other people do? Or is it because you realize that what is happening here is a celebration of and participation in the great watershed event of history — an event that is far more important than anything else that is happening in this world?

Whatever your answer, it is to your credit that you are here.

The men in the parable did not realize the importance of what Jesus was saying and doing. They thought He was just another rabbi with radical ideas that were actually a threat to their own positions of prominence. Ironically, they were the very ones who should have realized what was unfolding before them.

God spent a long time preparing for the revelation of his kingdom on earth. When the time was right, He sent Jesus into the world both to announce and to establish that kingdom. In the Gospel of Mark that proclamation was Our Lord's first public pronouncement: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand."

St. Peter's sermon on Pentecost is filled with illusions to the preparations that had been made for the coming of the Messiah. St. Paul says in Galatians, "When the fulness of time had come, God sent forth his son." The whole book of Hebrews is about how the worship practices of Israel pointed to and found their consummation in the ministry of Jesus and how the great figures of Jewish history looked forward to the great day. In St. John's Gospel, it is Jesus Himself who says to the Jewish leaders of his day, "You search the Scriptures [our Old Testament, of course,] because you think that in them you have eternal life, but it is they that testify of me."

There had been plenty of advance notice, so the invitation to the feast should have been the top priority of the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day, the whole purpose for which their religion was established. That priority was lost, however, in a sea of other priorities.

But God has His priorities also, and He is determined that His will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven. When the leaders of His people failed to respond to the words and the works of Jesus, God filled their seats at the banquet table with those at the lowest levels of society — the poor, the lame, the blind, those who in those days were the beggars and the homeless. Those were the people who, together with the working class Jews, plus the prostitutes tax collectors and other outcasts, responded to God's gracious invitation: "Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Come; for all things are now ready."

I am reminded of a short story by Flannery O'Connor. She writes about a woman who describes herself as a "respectable, hard-working, church-going woman." Sometimes at night she occupies herself by reviewing the various classes of people in the Southern society of which she is a part. At the bottom were most of the colored people — not all of them but most of them. There were a few who owned their own homes and had money and worked in a profession. Just above, or maybe on a par with, the majority of negroes were the white trash. Above them were the hard-working home owners, of which this woman was one. Above them were the people with real money and lots of property. But some of them were common and did not deserve to be ranked so high, and some of them had lost their money and had to rent.

One day some young deranged woman had called this respectable lady an old wart hog from Hell and had hit her with a book and tried to choke her. Later that day, after she had recovered, this proper lady was reflecting on that incident and arguing with God about it when she had a vision. In that vision she saw a bridge to heaven with people making their way across it. At the head of the line were what she called "white-trash, clean for the first time in their lives, and bands of black niggers in white robes, and battalions of freaks and lunatics clapping and leaping like frogs." Bringing up the rear of the procession were a bunch of people like her, marching in good order with great dignity, the only