

**Sermon for Morning Prayer:
The Second Sunday after Trinity¹**

The Reverend Warren E. Shaw, Priest in Charge

The Lessons:²

The First Lesson: here beginneth the thirteenth Verse of the thirty-first Chapter of the Book of Job.³

“... If I did despise the cause of my manservant or of my maidservant, when they contended with me; What then shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him? Did not he that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb? If I have withheld the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail; Or have eaten my morsel myself alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof; (For from my youth he was brought up with me, as with a father, and I have guided her from my mother’s womb;) If I have seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor without covering; If his loins have not blessed me, and if he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep; If I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless, when I saw my help in the gate: Then let mine arm fall from my shoulder blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone. For destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of his highness I could not endure. If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; If I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much; If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness; And my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand: This also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the thirteenth Chapter of the First Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians.⁴

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “And now abide faith, hope, and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”⁵ In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

Today’s Second Lesson is about priorities. It’s about what is important and what is not so important in the Church. It’s about what is essential and what is peripheral. It’s about what is temporary and what is permanent.

done as additional facts and insights emerge from further research. “When that which is perfect has come”, says the Apostle, “that which is imperfect shall be done away”.

St. Paul looks forward to the time when the world will pass away and the dead will be raised and the Kingdom of God will be revealed in all its fullness. When that happens, all with the faults and the defects that do not spring from God will disappear, and those things that are temporary and of limited value will disappear along with them.

No more speaking in tongues. No more prophecies. No more theological arguments. No more jealousy or envy or resentment or arrogance or scandal or personal ambition.

Christ will present the Church to his Father as a pure and spotless bride. And she will be adorned with the three cardinal virtues, which are essential to her life and will abide in her forever. Those essential gifts have been given to her by Christ the bridegroom. They are “faith, hope, and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

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St. David’s Anglican Church
Charlottesville, Virginia

March 6, 2011¹

¹ This sermon was delivered at Mass on Quinquagesima Sunday, for which the Epistle appointed is the same as the Second Lesson at Morning Prayer on Trinity II.

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

³ Job 31:13-28 (KJV).

⁴ I Corinthians 13:1-13 (KJV).

⁵ I Corinthians 13:13 (RSV).

One of the things that makes for fragmentation and dissension in the church and among the churches is the inability to make such distinctions. People tend to grab hold of what are really minor matters, what is traditionally called “adiaphora”, and hold them up as essential. Some churches even build their identity around such teachings and practices.

The debate about priorities goes back to the earliest days of the church, and in this letter to the church in Corinth St. Paul attempts to sort it all out. He begins by saying that some of the spiritual gifts that are being exercised in the church are worthless unless they are accompanied by and made effective by love.

I’m not going to try to explain the differences among the various Greek words that are translated into English by the single word “love”. But I will observe that the word that is here translated as “charity” in the King James Version and as “love” in the Revised Standard Version is the same word that St. John uses when he says in both translations “God is love.”

St. Paul and St. John have a way of saying the same thing in different ways. St. John says, “love is of God,” and the grammatical construction, combined with the previous statement that God is love, means that love originates with and partakes in the nature of God. St. Paul agrees. So when he says that anything in the church that does not involve love is of no value, perhaps he means that what does not originate with and convey the love of God is of no value and will not endure.

There are things the Apostle observes in the Corinthian church that are not of God and do not belong in any church. He mentions:

Envy and jealousy
Arrogance and boasting
Resentment and personal ambition
Reveling in scandal

These are contrasted with characteristics and behaviors that do belong because they are of God and reflect God's own nature:

- Patience and tolerance
- Love of truth
- Pursuit of righteousness
- Endurance and hope
- Belief in the whole Gospel and not just part of it

We need to cultivate these characteristics and resist the others.

There are other things going on in the church that have some passing value but are not considered by St. Paul to be permanent or essential. Some of these practices can still be found in the church today but are not the norm and, while helpful to the spiritual growth of some individuals, are still not essential to the life of the church as a whole. The first one of these that he mentions is the phenomenon of speaking in tongues.

There is some question about just what this phenomenon is. In the Pentecost story in Acts, it seems to be the ability of the Apostles to speak languages they had never studied or learned but that people who spoke those languages could understand. It is also possible that the gift worked the other way. The people who heard the preaching of the Gospel were able to understand it in their own native language, whatever that language was.

Either way, the important thing is that the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel was reversed so that communication of the Gospel was enabled across linguistic and cultural lines.

That experience does not seem to be what St. Paul is referring to in this passage. The "glossolalia," as it is called, that is occurring in the church at Corinth seems to be an almost mystical ability to speak an unearthly language that no one can understand except God, and probably the angels, and perhaps some individual who has been given the special ability to interpret it. Even the speaker does not understand the gibberish coming out of his

mouth, but the belief is that this is an effective form of private prayer.

It may be, but in a public gathering this kind of speaking in tongues inhibits rather than assists communication with other people. So in another place, St. Paul, who claims to have this gift himself, prohibits its use in public worship unless there is someone present who has ability to interpret the sounds. And I say sounds because they are not really words. They are too deep for words, as the Apostle says in writing to the Romans. This gift has only temporary value and so cannot be considered essential to the life of the church. "If there be tongues, they shall cease."

The same is true of the gift of prophecy, which in this context is the ability to predict future events, not as the result of observation and rational projection, which lots of people can do, but as a result of special revelation, usually received in some kind of trance. Apparently that was fairly common in the early days of the church, but is extremely rare today.

The knowledge that the Apostle refers to is theological insight. This knowledge may be related to the claims of the Gnostics that I'll be talking about in the Lenten series. St. Paul says two things about it. First, if it is not inspired by God and accompanied by godliness, it is useless. Second, it too will vanish away.

Unfortunately there are scholars and religious authorities today who claim to have vast insights into the origins and intricacies of the Bible but their knowledge is not of God and is accompanied more by arrogance than by love. These men and women do not really believe the Gospel and do not practice the disciplines of church membership, but they get a lot of publicity in the secular press, which they revel in, and sometimes succeed in destroying the simple faith of those whom they consider to be ignorant and gullible.

God will deal with such people in time, but even in their lifetime many of them see their theories and insights being aban-