

**Sermon for Morning Prayer
The Fourth Sunday after Trinity**

The Reverend Warren E. Shaw, Priest Associate

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-second Verse of the third Chapter of the Lamentations of Jeremiah.²

“It is of the LORD’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him. He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope. He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach. For the LORD will not cast off for ever: But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-fourth Verse of the tenth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Matthew.³

“. . . The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household? Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known. What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops. And fear not them which

kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows. Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text: "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it."⁴

Homily:

I first began to understand these words when I taught my first Sunday School class. I was a teenager, and a very busy one. I went to an elite and highly competitive high school, so I had to study a lot. I sang in the church choir, played in a band, belonged to several organizations including the Boy Scouts, competed on athletic teams and held a part-time job. That all meant practice time and meeting time as well as performance time, and of course I also had my errands and family chores at home. But in spite of all that I volunteered to teach a Sunday School class.

More time to spend on preparation, more meetings to attend, and more effort to be present on time every Sunday, even when I was tired from being out late the night before.

Teaching, as many of you know, involves a certain amount of risk. You can embarrass yourself if you don't know how to answer a question or deal with a situation that develops in the classroom. But I learned what every teacher knows. The teacher learns more than the students and gets back much more than he gives.

I had read the words of Jesus and heard them read many times, but the meaning of these words escaped me. "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it." The statement made no sense. It still doesn't. It flies in the face of common sense. But whether I understand it or not, I cannot deny my experience. I gave myself, and I got back much more than I gave.

The more I thought about it the more I came to realize that it had always been that way in my life. Those times as a child when I felt so full of life were the times I shared my toys or gave someone a gift or helped my mother or my father. The times when I really felt bad were the times I withdrew into myself and thought about all the things I wanted and did not have. When I worried about myself and kept my fears and my thoughts to myself, those were the times I was unhappy and felt devoid of life.

There are people who can tell you the exact date and time when they gave their lives to Christ. They made a conscious decision. They made it once and it turned their life around. That has not been my experience. My experience is that little by little I surrendered control of my life to Christ. Little by little I put my own desires and my own priorities and plans in second place behind the demands of Jesus. My testimony is that in so doing I found my real self, the part of myself that is worth holding on to. It was in Christ, after all, that God chose to share His life with us. By sharing myself with others I become more like Him.

I never really wanted to be a clergyman. Sometimes I still wish I could be something else and do something else. But the only way to avoid the call of God would be to rebel, and I know that the way of rebellion is the way of death. The way of obedience has proven to be not only the way of life but the way of fulfillment for me.

I am by nature a private person and I like to hold everything in and keep my possessions my thoughts and my feelings to myself. But I know that when I do that, my world gets smaller and my life gets smaller. It is when I take the risk of sharing myself with others that I find my true identity as a Christian.

The decision to hold on or let go is not a once and for all decision. It is a decision I have to make every day, and so do you. I sometimes make the prudent decision to avoid the risk of being hurt, being rejected, and being embarrassed. I always pay a price for that. I find myself alone, cut off from my fellow men and from my Lord — a pitiful scared little man shut up in a castle under siege. What I thought were my defenses turn out be the walls of my prison. I find my life slipping away, and the more I try to hold onto it the more it crumbles in my hands. It is then that the words of Jesus penetrate my soul and call me out of myself and into His life: “He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it.”

I’m sorry I have talked so much about myself today. I know that’s not what you came to hear. You came to hear about Jesus. You came to hear how what He said and what He did affects your life. But that’s *your* testimony. I can only tell you about the effect His words and His deeds have had on *my* life. I can testify, and I do testify, that what the words Jesus has said have proven to be true in my life whenever I have acted upon them.

For the sake of your soul, I urge you to do the same. Put these words to the test in your life: “He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it.”

St. David’s Anglican Church
Charlottesville, Virginia

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¹ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxvi (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² Lamentations 3: 22-33 (KJV).

³ St. Matthew 10: 24-39 (KJV).

⁴ St. Matthew 10: 39 (RSV).