

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
The Eighth Sunday after Trinity²

Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-fourth Verse of the eleventh Chapter of the Proverbs.⁴

“... There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself. He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him: but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it. He that diligently seeketh good procureth favour: but he that seeketh mischief, it shall come unto him. He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch. He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind: and the fool shall be servant to the wise of heart. The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise. Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fifteenth Verse of the seventh Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.⁵

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

“Not every one that saith [SETH] unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

Our Second Lesson today comes to us once again at the tail end of the Sermon on the Mount. After Jesus teaches the people about holiness, prayer, fasting, judging, He begins to wrap up with this warning: “Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing but are inwardly ravaging wolves.” So Christ is giving us instruction, now, on the priceless gift of discernment.

Most people, looking at this when reading the entirety of Chapter 7 of St. Matthew, will turn to verse 1 and say, “But I thought you told us not to judge?” Especially after our Lord continues to tell us that we should become fruit inspectors, one begins to see how this could tie in with, and somehow contradict with, what He teaches in there about judging others.⁷

What we don’t realize, though, is that our interpretation of judging others has become so warped that we are afraid to

Spirit of God, or was it a ritual cleansing, going through the motions, a check-the-block-and-get-the-certificate type of action?

The Church is filled with both types of persons, both lay and leaders. And we have to be sure that the mission, values, and fruit of the Church are not hindered by those that are carnally minded. For those of God's elect, they receive the spirit of adoption, where the Spirit of God Himself beareth witness to our spirit. Remember that everyone who says to Him, Lord, Lord, shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of the Father which is in heaven.

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The Rev'd Stephen Victory¹⁴
August 14, 2011

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 This sermon was originally written on the Gospel at Mass on the Eighth Sunday after Trinity, 2011.

³ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxi (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁴ Proverbs 11:24-end (KJV).

⁵ St. Matthew 7:15-21 (KJV).

⁶ St. Matthew 7:15 (KJV).

⁷ St. Matthew 7:1-5.

⁸ St. Matthew 13:24-30.

⁹ Galatians 5:22-26 (KJV).

¹⁰ Galatians 5:19-21 (KJV).

¹¹ Galatians 5:16-17 (KJV).

¹² Romans 8:14 (KJV).

¹³ St. John 3 5-7 (KJV).

¹⁴ Rector, St. Charles King and Martyr Anglican Church (APCK), Huntsville, AL.

call out sin when we see it. What He is trying to tell us there is that we can't point the finger at someone out of self righteousness, because if it were not for the grace of God, there we would go, too. But we have to maintain the integrity of the Body of Christ, to keep her pure and holy, so we have to inspect the fruit of those within the Body, and those who come and want to be a part of the Body.

We can't be prideful or arrogant in our discernment, because we have to love all with the same self sacrificial love as does Christ, but we do have to protect the harvest of God's elect, and weed out those who are imitators, from those who are genuine believers.

We see in the parable of the wheat and tares⁸ that as the good seed was sown, the enemy came by and sowed weeds, or tares, alongside with the wheat. On the outside, both are indistinguishable. As a matter of fact, that portion of the parable warns us that we should be delicate in how we handle these tares, or wolves in sheep's clothing, because if we uproot them too soon, it tells us we might uproot the wheat as well.

Another word for those weeds is darnel. And actually darnel stimulates the growth of the wheat, at first. When it is in the blade stage, it looks identical to wheat, and would take a botanist to decipher the two. But as it begins to grow, the darnel begins to develop its own properties, and can be toxic if consumed by animals or man. As a matter of fact, one would suffer vertigo if one were to eat it.

So we have to be aware that all those who call themselves followers of Christ are not. You can ask just about any one you meet if they are Christians and the common response is, “Well, I go to such and such Church.” My reply to such a response would have to be, and has been, that going to Church no more makes you a Christian than standing in a garage makes

you a car. And we have to be cautious and discerning when dealing with these types of people.

In our attempt to inspect their fruit, we have to inspect per the guidance given to us in sacred Scripture. But to be honest, if we genuinely live out the Gospel and the good news of sacred Scripture, then you will visually begin to see the separation between the wheat and the tares, the genuine believers from the imitators.

And that is how we handle them delicately. Our Second Lesson today says that every good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. So as we begin to produce the good fruit of the Gospel in our dealings with others, and in our relationship with God through Christ Jesus, those that cannot produce good fruit will begin to weed themselves out, because that which is unrighteous cannot dwell amongst the righteous.

And if that which is capable of producing good fruit does not bear fruit, in our calling to be fruit bearers, then that which cannot produce good fruit remains, and steals the vital nutrients needed to live by out of the soil from the garden of healthful spirituality. Those that can bear good fruit begin to wither because of the lack of vital nutrients. And as the nutrients are drained, the good trees no longer have the capability of bearing good fruit.

But what does it mean to bear good fruit? St. Paul explains this thoroughly in his Epistle to the Galatians: ***“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, self control. Against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, we must also follow the Spirit. We must not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”***⁹

He also defines what it means to be an imitator, one who may act the part of a Christian, but inwardly holds on to the things of the flesh. He says, ***“Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar, about which I tell you in advance—as I told you before—that those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God.”***¹⁰

And to begin these instructions, He says, ***“I say then, walk by the spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to each other.”***¹¹

Bottom line--- those that are imitators, even though they appear to be capable of producing righteousness, live after the lusts of the flesh internally, as Saint Paul points out to us in Romans, where he points out something that automatically separates the two: ***“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God.”***¹² And of course, in his Epistle to the Galatians, in Chapter 5, he explains the fullness of understanding of what it means to be led, and to live by the Spirit of God.

And this echoes what Jesus revealed to Nicodemus about being born again: ***“unless someone is born of water and the Spirit of God, he cannot enter the Kingdom.”***¹³ Jesus continues to say that ***“whatever is born of flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of Spirit is spirit.”***

And that is where the rubber meets the road in our outlook in what it means to be a fruit-bearer. When we were baptized into the Body of Christ, was it a birth born out of repentance, where we felt the Spirit of God calling us to the resurrected life, a life consumed by the power and presence of the