

**SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER**  
**The Ascension<sup>1</sup>**

**Lessons:<sup>2</sup>**

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the ninth Verse of the seventh Chapter of the Book of Daniel.<sup>3</sup>

“I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened. ... I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the fourth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians.<sup>4</sup>

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive,

and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

**Text:**

From the Second Lesson: *“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”*<sup>5</sup> In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

**Homily:**

It is sometimes difficult to live a Christian lifestyle. We are surrounded with temptations, challenges and burdens

forbearance, the love, and unity for which our common Christian life calls. When we fail, reprove us gently and return us to Your path. When we doubt, fill our minds with Your reassuring joy, and, finally, bring us with all Your Saints into Your eternal kingdom. Amen.

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September 30, 2012

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<sup>1</sup> This sermon was originally written on the Epistle for Holy Communion on the Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxiv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

<sup>3</sup> Daniel 7: 9-10, 13-14 (KJV).

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 4: 1-16 (KJV).

<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 4:1-6 (NIV).

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 4:1 (NIV).

<sup>7</sup> Ephesians 4:2 (NIV).

<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 4:4 (NIV).

<sup>9</sup> Article 1, *The Articles of Religion*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 603 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

<sup>10</sup> Ephesians 4:5 (NIV).

<sup>11</sup> St. Luke 11:17 (RSV).

<sup>12</sup> St. Luke 9:23 (RSV).

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seemingly at every turn. Sadly, some of the most destructive of those challenges come not from without the faith, but from within.

This is especially true for us who strive to remain faithful to the Scriptures in our lives and who try to refrain from “innovations,” and changes that are little more than giving in to current popular whim.

We can be re-assured, then, that even in the time of St. Paul this was true. Paul found himself in prison, but was still called upon to write to the church at Ephesus to urge the church there to refrain from bickering, in-fighting and dissent: “*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*”<sup>6</sup>

We are all called to this same vocation: to live in the Lord and His ways. Paul is asking that we all continue to take the Gospel message seriously and live up to its demands on us. Too, it is interesting that Paul asks that the church—and we—“walk worthy”, which he, being in prison, could not do. He could only write, while we are free to move about and spread the message.

St. Paul makes no pretense as to how hard this is: “*with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love ....*”<sup>7</sup> It is difficult to live in community with other fallible human beings. For us to continue to get along with each other requires that we forgive each other (and ourselves) often. We have to be prepared to accept each other’s foibles and failures as our own. And we need to be cognizant that others are doing the same thing for us.

In any community of people, one of the things the members report being hardest to do is to get along with each

other. At first, of course, it isn't so hard, but, over time, people seem to grate on each other, exceedingly fine at first like a bit of sandpaper, then progressively rougher, as a cheese grater. It is said that the main thing any couple needs in a marriage is a sense of humor. The two partners have to be able to laugh at each other to avoid doing serious injury to each other. The laughter comes from love.

Living in Christian community is like that. How many times have churches split apart over infighting among the members? So Paul tells the Ephesians to consider first that he is literally a prisoner for the faith, and that they should consider that they bear the name of Christ and should act accordingly: "*Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.*"

And how do we do this thing? Paul says we must strive for unity of the Spirit and the unity of peace. Be faithful friends of all Christians and be a sworn enemy to sin. We should not allow ourselves to be easily provoked or offended. But this is a very difficult thing to achieve.

We are so prone to look for offense, even when none was intended. We imagine that others are trying to cause us difficulty, even when no such intent was present at all. But St. Paul calls us away from all that: "*With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love.*" Be humble. Be gentle of spirit. Be patient. Be willing to forgive, even when we have been injured. After all, we have much for which we, too, need to be forgiven.

Maintain always the family of Christ, for it is in that family that we live and thrive and grow and without it we would be alone. But if we can live in this unity of spirit, then we continue to support each other, uphold each other, support each other and love each other, just as Paul urged us to, and how we are commanded to in the Gospel.

"*There is one body, and one Spirit,*"<sup>8</sup> Paul says. The one body is the body of Christ, of which we are members. None of those members stand alone or apart or can function appropriately without all the rest of the members. Each of the members of the body partakes in the same calling, being a Christian and living the Christian life which brings forgiveness of our sins and salvation, leading to eternal life.

And, as we should remember from our catechisms and the Articles of Religion, "*There is but one living and true God, everlasting...*"<sup>9</sup> But if "*There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism,*"<sup>10</sup> as St. Paul points out, why do we fight among ourselves? Christians are supposed to be known for their peaceable, friendly manner and willingness to live together without rancor or discord. Sadly, too often we fail to live up to that reputation.

Our Lord warned that "*Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls.*"<sup>11</sup> We cannot permit ourselves to be that kingdom that is laid waste or the household that falls. We must be, rather, the kingdom that is united, strong and sure, and the household that stands behind all its members, upholding them in love, in forgiveness and in harmony as our Lord would have us to do.

It is not easy. Our Lord did not promise us a carefree and easy life. Rather He called us to "*Take up (our) cross daily and follow me.*"<sup>12</sup> We must live up to this vocation to which we are called and live as Christians. Remember that a trade not practiced will support no one, but this finest of trades, applied and practiced well will result in eternal life through the One Lord, faith and baptism and the One God who is above all, through all and in us all.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, You have called us to follow You in all things, including in our mode of life. Help us to show forth the