

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
The Fourth Sunday in Lent

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fifty-fifth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.³

“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people. Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee.

“Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith [SETH] the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees

of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the forty-first Verse of the sixth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John.⁴

“... The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven. And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith [SETH], I came down from heaven? Jesus therefore answered and said unto them, Murmur not among yourselves. No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me. Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Texts:

From the First Lesson: “*Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is*

So, call upon the Lord. Ask Him to be in your life each and every day. Come to His table every week to join again in His feast. Everyone—even if on a diet—is welcome.

Let us pray:

Lord, We know that we rely on You and You alone to feed our souls. Nourish and strengthen us, that we may continue to do the things You would have us do. As we pray, “give us this day our daily bread,” help us to understand that it is not just our bodies that we pray You to preserve, but our eternal lives. Give us the wisdom always to give Honor and Glory to You. This we pray in your blessed son, Jesus Christ’s Holy name. Amen.

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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 xix (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ Isaiah 55:1-end (KJV).

⁴ St. John 6:41-51 (KJV).

⁵ Isaiah 55:1-2 (KJV).

⁶ St. John 6: 48-51 (KJV).

⁷ *Apostles Creed*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 15 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943; *Nicene Creed*, *op. cit.* 16.

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There is a triple meaning here. Not only did our Lord come down from Heaven to live as one of us, to teach, to minister and to love as he spread His Word, so that any one who accepts His word and so spiritually eats of His bread will live forever, but He also gave His human body up to be crucified under Pontius Pilate. This was in redemption and ablution of our sins so He literally gave His flesh for us. But He also instituted the Holy Communion for us so that we might partake of His Body and Blood each time we receive communion, and thus life, in and through Him.

Consider this food: The Word of God, given to us through the Scriptures and in the person of Jesus Christ. By receiving this Word, our souls are fed and satisfied. By receiving this Word we learn to accept our Lord Jesus Christ and His ways. Through Him we learn of the Father and the Holy Spirit.

By the Word and the person of Jesus Christ, we are saved. Instead of the desolation and utter oblivion of sin, we find eternal life and joy. By His sacrifice, we are saved from the punishment of our sins, and thus we are again fed by our Lord.

By partaking in Holy Communion, we are continually fed as we return again and again to His table to find joy, relief and peace. Through His Body and Blood we are satisfied, in body and in soul, both now and forever.

And no matter how many times we return to the altar of the Lord, no matter how often we call upon His name, no matter how many times we feed ourselves with His grace, still we do not gain weight. While our souls may enjoy what Isaiah calls fatness, we need not fear stepping on the scale on that account. Nor need you fear if your wallet is empty, so long as your heart is open to God's love and direction.

not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.”⁵

And from the Second Lesson: *“I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”⁶*

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

There is good news today for dieters. It has been something of an article of faith among those who seem to constantly be on one kind of diet or another that the food that we eat on Sundays has no calories. Both of our lessons today have to do with food images and neither tells you not to eat or to eat less. In fact, they tell you to eat your fill, and for free.

The menu will be simple—but this food will sustain you not just for now, but forever.

In the First Lesson, the prophet Isaiah calls everyone to the feast of God. The call is not limited to those who are able to pay, or who are members of the “in group”. Indeed, Isaiah calls all to the feast. *“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat”*. Anyone who thirsts, not in the physical sense, but for spiritual refreshment, is called.

And who provides this wonderful feast? God does. To make the point that this spiritual food and drink is not purchased with the labor of human hands, Isaiah goes on, *“he that*

hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat.” It is not human currency of money that buys this meal that lasts to all time, but rather God’s currency of faith, worship and love. It is a gift of inestimable value, yet is offered free of charge to us. It matters not whether we are rich or poor, whether we have found great success in business or in life, or not. Our “ticket” to the feast is our faith in Him who offers it. No amount of human toil can earn the gift.

Indeed, the prophet points out that dependence on human means to obtain heavenly gifts is futile, and is doomed to fail. *“Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfieth not,”* he asks. Why do you waste your time and effort trying to obtain by human means those things that can only come from God? Rather than listening to false doctrine, wasting time and following false teachers, stick to the truth, the Word of God.

Do not seek happiness in the things of the world, nor in the esteem of men. Do not fool yourself into thinking that you can by your own labor achieve righteousness.

Instead, *“hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness,”* Isaiah suggests. As our Lord says in the Second Lesson, *“I am that bread of life.”* Listen to Jesus, live in his Word and be satisfied.

The prophet calls us to God’s feast, and in the Second Lesson, our Lord tells us more about the feast to which we are called. It is a feast like none before. It is the one and only way to eternal life. It is not like the *manna* on which the Israelites lived while wandering in the wilderness for the forty years following their escape from Egypt.

“Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead,” our Lord tells us. The *manna* was sufficient to allow them to live during their wanderings, but it was a corporeal food, not spiritual.

The bread which our Lord offers is instead Himself. Perfect in every way, it is satisfying to the body and the soul, and becomes the manner by which we share in Jesus’ sacrifice.

“This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.” Not only can this bread keep us alive during our mortal life, it keeps us alive eternally. By partaking sacramentally and spiritually of this bread, we become one with our Lord Jesus Christ, and share in His eternal life.

This bread quickens the soul. Remember the word quicken means to give life.

In an earlier time, women called the time when they first noticed their unborn children moving within the womb as “quickening”. We also know the term from the Apostles and Nicene Creed, in which we say that we know that Jesus will come again *“to judge the quick and the dead...,”*⁷ meaning he will judge both those living and those already dead. He will be our judge—and the judge of all creation.

When we eat of this bread, Jesus assures us, we will never again hunger, just as He assured the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar that if she drank of the water of life which He offered, she would never again thirst. For our very soul will be fed with the righteousness and security for which we all long desperately. And, while we still may die in the body, our souls are secure in eternal life through Jesus Christ. We may die, but we are risen again with Him in eternal life. This is our assurance which He gives to us.

“I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”