

**SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER**  
**Saint Matthias (February 24)<sup>1</sup>**

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

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the twenty-seventh Verse of the second Chapter of the First Book of Samuel, otherwise called the First Book of the Kings.<sup>3</sup>

“And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith [SETH] the LORD, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh’s [FAY-rose] house? And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel? Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people? Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith [SETH], I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith [SETH], Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father’s house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever. And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age. And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni [HAHFF-nye] and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them. And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the fifteenth Verse of the seventh Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Matthew.<sup>4</sup>

“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. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Grant this for the sake of our only Advocate and Savior, Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

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The Rev. Mr. Larry Wagoner, MSW<sup>8</sup>  
Sunday, July 29, 2012

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

<sup>2</sup> *Psalms and Lessons for the Fixed Holy Days* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xlv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

<sup>3</sup> I Samuel 2:27-35 (KJV).

<sup>4</sup> St. Matthew 7:15-27 (KJV).

<sup>5</sup> St. Matthew 7:16-20 (RSV).

<sup>6</sup> St. Matthew 7:15 (RSV).

<sup>7</sup> St. Matthew 7:21 (RSV).

<sup>8</sup> Deacon, The Diocese of New Orleans, The Anglican Catholic Church, serving Holy Angels Anglican Catholic Mission, Picayune, MS, and Christ Church Anglican Catholic Pro-Cathedral Church, Metairie, LA.

They say they are “tearing down old structures” and “rejecting old worn-out standards”, but they fail to remember that the structures and standards they are rejecting are God’s. We can perhaps imagine them at the Day of Judgment, trying to explain why they thought they knew better than God does.

If the tree is good, then it will produce good fruit. If a man is following the laws of God, he cannot help but to do good works. It is not the works that make the man good; we cannot do any good by ourselves, but only by the grace of God. But if we follow the grace of God, we cannot do evil.

So too a prophet or teacher: if he follows the doctrines of the Gospel, he will deliver sound doctrine. He will deliver truth and inspiration to those who hear him. The false prophet or teacher, who follows some other doctrine, cannot deliver truth. His teaching will be false, as will his doctrine, and will do evil to those who hear him. He can do nothing else.

And “*ye shall know them by their fruits.*” A man’s works tell if he is inwardly corrupt or pure. They are the “confession of his heart.” Our Lord has told us how to judge and given this warning: that the false prophet, like the unfruitful tree, will be cast into the fire. “*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven...*”<sup>7</sup>

What every man actually does is the fruit of his tree: “*By their fruit shall ye know them.*”

Let us pray.

Guide us, O Lord, to always seek wisdom in Your word, example in Your life, guidance in Your will, and grace from Your Holy Spirit. Help us always to be the good tree, so that we bear good fruit. As we acknowledge You to be our Lord, so take over our lives that we may always be fruitful servants.

### **Text:**

From the Second Lesson: “*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.*”<sup>5</sup>

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

### **Homily:**

“*By their fruits ye shall know them.*”

This is where the proverbial “rubber meets the road.” Never mind pretty words, beguiling smiles, flashy clothes or a stuffed wallet. None of those things matters a whit when you stand before God.

We live today in a world packed with spokesmen, experts and prophets of one thing or another, each claiming to have the inside track to fortune, to living a better life, to happiness and to commanding the respect of all those around us. Even “ministers” have gotten into the act, announcing with the breathless abandon of a used car dealer that God wants them to drive a newer, bigger car, or to purchase some newer larger building, and that all we need to do to get God to love us too is to open our wallets and send them some money.

We have entire denominations that have simply abandoned Scripture, apparently deciding that what God said was just not politically correct enough, or progressive enough, or personally profitable enough for them to follow.

Today's Gospel reading is a warning against false prophets, who teach false doctrine, and make false claims in the name of God. Our Lord warns us of these people, and of the danger they pose to our souls. They are known for teaching things that are contrary to God's word and will, and thus which are lies.

Those that pretend to be teachers and prophets but who teach false doctrine are "*wolves in sheep's clothing*," says our Lord.<sup>6</sup> Wolves, we know, may sneak by guile into the midst of the flock, but they intent evil and destruction. They may manage to sneak amongst us by their fancy dress, or their skillful use of words. They may seem innocent, harmless, even useful, only later to turn out to be capable of such destruction.

They can not only destroy the faith of individuals, but they can tear apart communities of God's people. Saint John says that when these evil ones come, the sheep are scattered, driven from each other and from God. They try to destroy any community that might protect the flock, and leave each individual alone and defenseless.

How many of you can think of situations in which you have seen this destruction at work? How many of you can recall a situation in which some person has come in and begin immediately to tear people apart, to spread falsehoods, to damage relationships and even to destroy entire groups?

Satan is a cruel and cunning foe, taking every opportunity to damage us. We must be on guard at all times. Using the illustration of the fruit of the tree, our Lord tells us how we can do that.

First, ignore the bark and the leaves of the growing tree. Those are merely coverings, like fancy clothes. Focus instead on the fruit of the tree. What does it actually produce? Men may adopt a false outward appearance, but they cannot produce other than that which they are. The fruit is according to the tree.

A thorn bush cannot produce grapes, though you might find a grape hanging in a thorn bush. The thistle cannot produce figs. Corrupted people are like thorns and thistles. They cannot produce that which is not their nature.

This is not to suggest that God cannot change a person. Certainly the master husband-man can graft to the old tree the makings of the new and productive branch. But the tree itself cannot do this work. From evil will come evil, and from good will come good. A good tree—as a good person—cannot bring forth bad fruit. It is not in their nature, any more than it is the nature of the bad tree to bring forth good fruit.

To know whether a man be good or evil, then, we examine his words and actions. "*By their fruits shall ye know them.*"

Watch what he actually does—how he lives—how he speaks. False prophets tell lies and mislead. True prophets tell the truth and do not *mis*-lead, but rather *lead*. In our Lord's day, scribes and Pharisees taught the law but did not apply it to themselves. They routinely violated the standards of God; they were proud, covetous and harsh rather than being humble, honest and generous.

See what doctrine those who would be prophets espouse. Is it of God, or of man? God's doctrines lead to humility, charity, loving-kindness, generosity, holiness and love. Do the false prophets encourage these things?

Pay attention to the results of the doctrines of the prophets and teachers. Are they the desired ends of our Lord? Do they respect the plainly-stated Scriptural standards? Some of the false prophets of our day love to say that they are "modernizing the faith in modern times," but did they ask God first, or simply listen to their own voices?