

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
The Fourth Sunday after Trinity²

Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the ninth Verse of the twenty-ninth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.⁴

“Stay yourselves, and wonder; cry ye out, and cry: they are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink. For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered. And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith [SETH], I cannot; for it is sealed: And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith [SETH], I am not learned.

“Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid. Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the LORD, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

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

“Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also

transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias⁶ prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

“And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man. Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying? But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch. Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable. And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding? Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught [DRAFT]? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: *“Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very*

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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 This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Second Sunday in Lent, 2013.

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

⁴ Isaiah 29:9-15 (KJV).

⁵ St. Matthew 15:1-20 (KJV).

⁶ *I.e.*, Isaiah.

⁷ St. Matthew 15:28 (KJV).

⁸ Hebrews 11:1 (KJV).

⁹ St. Matthew 17:20 (KJV).

¹⁰ St. Matthew 15:24 (KJV).

¹¹ St. Matthew 15:22 (KJV).

¹² St. Matthew 15:26 (KJV).

¹³ St. Matthew 15:27 (KJV).

¹⁴ St. Matthew 15:28 (KJV).

¹⁵ St. Matthew 8:10 (KJV).

¹⁶ St. Matthew 9:22 (KJV).

¹⁷ St. Matthew 9:29 (KJV).

¹⁸ St. Matthew 8:26 (KJV).

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hour.”⁷ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

How strong is your faith? If you have sufficient faith, there is no end to the works you can do, our Lord assures us.

Faith is from the Latin “fides”, which means to persuade, to believe or to obey. Faith is accepting the truth of something, even without evidence that is measureable in usual terms. We accept on faith certain things because we believe them to be true, even if we do not actually have evidence to convince us or to measure the objective truthfulness of our belief. Indeed, according to the Epistle to the Hebrews, * faith is “the evidence of things not seen.”⁸

No fewer than twelve times in St. Matthew’s Gospel, our Lord makes this point to His disciples, to those who came to hear and see Him, and to the Pharisees. With sufficient faith we might even command a mountain to be moved and it will move, Jesus assures us. *“If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.”*⁹

Consider the faith of the woman of Canaan, who approached Jesus to ask Him to cure her daughter. She was not a follower of Jesus, and apparently was not Jewish, for Jesus said to her when she asked His help, *“I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”*¹⁰

However, the woman was not deterred by this answer. Her faith told her that this man had the power and the ability to

* I would add this little bit of extra explanation because otherwise, to someone who is just listening to and not reading the sermon, this could sound as though it were the ancient Israelites who said this, not the NT Epistle.

heal her daughter. Regardless of whether she personally accepted His divinity, she accepted without question and without hesitation that Jesus could heal her daughter.

We do not know whether she had seen Jesus before somewhere else, and had become convinced of His power and authority, or whether she might only have heard of Him and how He was able to heal the sick and do miracles.

She was aware of Jesus' lineage, and apparently of His power even over the powers of evil, for she beseeched Him, *"Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil."*¹¹ When He said nothing in response to her pleading, she even came to worship Jesus, saying, *"Lord, help me."*

She had no doubt whatsoever that He was able to grant her wish that her daughter be cured. The thought that Jesus might not be able to cure her daughter clearly never even occurred to her. This is faith.

Jesus initially declined to help the woman. He did not suggest that He was not able to do so, nor that He might be prevented from doing so, but simply that He was not sent primarily to minister to those who are not Jewish: *"But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs."*¹² Even in the face of this rejection, the Canaanite woman's faith that Jesus not only could, but would, help her daughter was unshaken.

Undeterred, she replied, *"and she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."*¹³ She did not argue with Jesus, but pointed out that she was only asking for what seems a minor thing. It is clear that she believed that healing her daughter would not be any trouble or concern to our Lord. She was perfectly willing that Jesus do far greater miracles for others, if He would but deign to heal her daughter.

She pointed out that even though she is not a follower of His, still she recognized His power and authority, and recognized in Him the divine ability to heal. She therefore referred to him as her Lord and as Master. Jesus' reaction to her faith was to grant her request: *"Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour."*¹⁴

That our Lord values our faith is beyond question. He healed the servant of the Centurion, crediting the Centurion's faith.¹⁵ He also healed the woman with the issue of blood because of her faith.¹⁶ Jesus also restored the sight of the two blind men who approached Him, imploring Him to heal them.¹⁷ In each case, He plainly told those He helped—as well as those who witnessed the miracles—that they were healed because of their faith.

In other cases, Jesus lamented the lack of faith that even His own disciples displayed: *"Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?"*¹⁸

We have the entire Gospel and all the tradition and history of the Church to look back on and find reason to believe. Even in a time in which we see a nation that seems to have lost its bearings and grounding, still we can rest assured that we are in His hands.

How strong is your faith?

Let us pray.

Lord, strengthen our faith. When we doubt, reassure us. When we worry, calm us. When we fear, embolden us. When we weaken, strengthen us. Remind us whose we are, and let that knowledge give us peace and resolve to do whatever it is that thou callest us to do. In thy Holy Name we pray. *Amen.*