

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
The Seventh Sunday after Trinity¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fifth Verse of the sixth Chapter of The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus:³

“... Sweet language will multiply friends: and a fairspeaking tongue will increase kind greetings. Be in peace with many: nevertheless have but one counselor of a thousand. If thou wouldest get a friend, prove him first, and be not hasty to credit him. For some man is a friend for his own occasion, and will not abide in the day of thy trouble. And there is a friend, who being turned to enmity and strife will discover thy reproach. Again, some friend is a companion at the table, and will not continue in the day of thy affliction. But in thy prosperity he will be as thyself, and will be bold over thy servants. If thou be brought low, he will be against thee, and will hide himself from thy face. Separate thyself from thine enemies, and take heed of thy friends. A faithful friend is a strong defence: and he that hath found such an one hath found a treasure. Nothing doth countervail a faithful friend, and his excellency is invaluable. A faithful friend is the medicine of life; and they that fear the Lord shall find him. Whoso feareth the Lord shall direct his friendship aright: for as he is, so shall his neighbor be also.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twelfth Verse of the fifteenth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John.⁴

“... This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not ser-

The Rev. Mr. Larry Wagoner, MSW¹¹
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vants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all the things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. These things I command you, that ye love one another. If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before *it hated* you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me. If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin. He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. But *this cometh to pass*, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause. But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, *even* the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “*These things I command you, that ye love one another. If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*”⁵ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Feast of SS. Simon and Jude, 2012.

² *Psalms and Lessons for the Church Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxviii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ *Ecclesiasticus* 6:5-17 (KJV).

⁴ St. John 15:12-end (KJV).

⁵ St. John 15:17-19 (RSV).

⁶ St. Matthew 22:36-40 (RSV).

⁷ St. John 15:18-19 (RSV).

⁸ St. John 15:21 (RSV).

⁹ St. John 15:22-24 (RSV).

¹⁰ St. John 15:26-27 (RSV).

¹¹ Deacon, The Diocese of New Orleans, The Anglican Catholic Church, serving at Holy Angels Anglican Catholic Mission, Picayune, MS, and Christ Church Anglican Catholic Pro-Cathedral Church, Metairie, LA.

“If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father.”⁹

Sometimes we have to choose. Choices have consequences. One of the consequences of our choice to follow God is that we may face discrimination, disrespect, misunderstanding, opposition and even hatred while we are here on earth. But our Lord will not leave us to face those things alone.

He gives us His reassurance, *“But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me; and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning.”¹⁰*

Sometimes we have to choose. Then it is critical that we make the right choice, that we choose to remain faithful to God and His law and to continue to be His servants in the world. The end results of our right choices are everlasting life and salvation.

Remember, He chose us first and He doesn't make mistakes.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, You have chosen us to be your followers in this world. We are in the world, but not of the world. In this time we face hatred and evil because we chose to stay with You. Keep us always strong to remain so dedicated to Your will and Your way that we may never be shaken, deceived or deterred from following You. As we were saved by Your precious death and Resurrection, let us not now waste the gift You have given us. This we ask in Your Holy Name. *Amen.*

Homily:

Sometimes you have to choose. Throughout time, this truth has been the subject of songs, of writings and of moralizing.

We must choose our friends. It is to be hoped we choose well, because our choices say a lot about us. Those with whom we surround ourselves will influence us greatly, and will in great part determine how others see us. It is often said “by their friends you shall know them”, or, more colloquially, “birds of a feather flock together”, and there is great truth to that. After all, we tend to be most comfortable with, and spend most of our time around, those with whom we feel similarities in life.

If we chose poorly, and surround ourselves with people who participate in evil, who sin voluntarily, and who disregard others, then it is sadly likely that we ourselves will do those very same things. On the other hand, if we spend much of our time with others who value a principled life, who respect other people, who try to live according to the laws of God, then we are likely to emulate them and to live the same way they do.

We must choose a job. Our life's occupation, too, will say much about us. Whether we are good at our chosen task, whether we are dedicated to our work and take care to do that work well speaks a world about us, either positively or negatively.

If we are on time to work, and learn our tasks well, performing them to the very best of our abilities and to the end of furthering the goals of our employer, then we are likely to do well and enjoy our work. If, on the other hand, our work is slipshod and careless, if we hate our work, and if we try to find any possible excuse not to go to work, then we are likely to be seen as a marginal worker at best and to have problems in our work life.

Similarly, we have to choose whether to accept and to try to live up to God's commands to us. God has commanded us to "*love one another.*" We are to hold each other in the esteem, respect, and love that God holds for us.

This command is the second of the Great Commandments, as our Lord explained. When asked, He told the Pharisee who questioned Him, "*Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?*" Jesus told the man, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.*"⁶

Will we choose to obey this commandment or will we not? Jesus reminds us that this choice has consequences, as do all of our choices. If we choose to follow God's law, then we may face criticism, envy, opposition, and even hatred, from those who do not follow His law. This can be painful, and, sadly, it causes some to fall away from God as they choose to follow some other path.

Just as we may face ridicule because we choose to surround ourselves with people who share our values rather than with the "in-crowd," we may face ridicule for choosing to follow God's law. Those who do not live principled lives often resent those who do. Perhaps they know that those who choose to follow God's path have wondrous rewards in store and they are jealous.

Just as being a good worker can draw criticism from those who are not so dedicated, showing your dedication to God's commands can make us subject to criticism for earnestly trying to follow God's will in our lives.

In today's world, if we choose to follow God's law and explain clearly and honestly why we cannot instead follow the mandates of political correctness, of popular opinion, or of current whim, we are called all sorts of vile names. Our honor is besmirched, our motives are called into question and we end up under a microscope as those, who do not choose to live God's way, try to find some fault in those who do so choose.

Jesus knows all about this, and He offers us comfort for those times when we face such trying pressure from the world: "*If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*"⁷

If then, we face the enmity of the world because we refuse to go along with the crowd, we can at least draw comfort from knowing that we walk beside our Lord. He faced the wrath of the world before we did, and He defeated those forces of evil. If we remain faithful, we too will be victorious with Him.

As our Lord proclaims, if we followed the ways of the world, then the world would love us. If we shared in evil, then the evil-doers would rejoice in our falling as well.

But if we refuse to be drawn away from God, if we remain steadfast in our love of God and His laws, then the world, which faces certain calamity, must hate us. The world faces this calamity because so many do not know God and follow Him: "*But all this they will do to you on my account, because they do not know him who sent me*",⁸ says Jesus.

It is not that they have not had the opportunity to know God. Jesus dispels that claim to innocence, pointing out that He has come to show them the truth.