

# SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER<sup>i</sup>

## The Second Sunday after Trinity<sup>ii</sup>

### Lessons:<sup>iii</sup>

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the eighth Verse of the fourth Chapter of the Second Book of the Kings, commonly called the Fourth Book of the Kings.<sup>iv</sup>

“And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem [**SHOE-nemm**], where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither. And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there. And he said to Gehazi [**geh-HAY-zye**] his servant, Call this Shunammite [**SHOE-numb-ight**]. And when he had called her, she stood before him. And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among mine own people. And he said, What then is to be done for her? And Gehazi [**geh-HAY-zye**] answered, Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old. And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door. And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid. And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the fourteenth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke.<sup>v</sup>

“Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy

kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.

“And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God. Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and shewed [SHOWD] his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

### **Homily:**

The First Epistle General of Saint John speaks clearly about the duties of Christian love, that is, charity (*agape*). It speaks of practical ways to live as a Christian among real people in the real world: “But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.”<sup>vi</sup> In today’s Second Lesson, in Our Lord’s parable of the guests invited to a great feast,<sup>vii</sup> we see that another practical way to love our neighbor is to “Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.”

Do we see the mission of the Church, evangelism, as a duty of charity? If we do not see it that way, then it means we fail to believe inwardly the very religion we practice outwardly. We stand at a crossroads, or even better, we are at a fork in the road. It is clear to me, from years of observation, that for a few people the whole idea of *continuing* the old ways of genuine Prayer Book Anglicanism never got beyond the legitimate concern of self-interest.

I do not condemn that. It is right to have enlightened self-interest. The commandment, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,” does little good for someone who lacks enlightened self-interest. It is certainly not intended for those who are self-destructive that they love their neighbor only to the degree that they love themselves. It is right to *love thyself* in the proper sense, which above all is based on loving God. For, if you love God, it is your first duty not to throw away your own soul, and that is because He has placed so great a value on your soul that it was redeemed by the costly and most worthy thing of all, the blood of His only begotten Son. Christ loved you and gave Himself for you. So, enlightened self-interest is part of fulfilling the First and Great Commandment to love the Lord thy God.

Nonetheless, the whole idea of *continuing* the old ways of genuine Prayer Book Anglicanism is quite worthy in itself, if we believe the Gospel at the center of it; and, this is true not merely for own sakes. Right as the legitimate kind of self-interest is, we must move forward beyond its limitations. We have preserved something good and valuable. More than that, we have at the very core of who we are and what we believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the very lifeline needed by each and every human being.

That is why many of our parishes have Evangelism Committees, and it is why we want to reach people in the world around us. The riches of God have been given to us so that we may be generous to those in need. A reality, a kind of law at work, is that the more we give away our spiritual wealth, the richer we become inwardly.

Now let us consider our duty, a duty of charity. Let’s think seriously about the words, “Go out into the highways and hedges, and

compel them to come in,” in light of where we are and in light of the times. We need to be realistic and practical, which is the only real way to be spiritual. So, where are we, and what are the times?

## **1. Neither the United States nor any Western European country is at present Christian country.**

It has been a long time since anyone could honestly make a case that any of them are. Let us look at something said by the second President of the United States, one of our greatest Founding Fathers, John Adams: “Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”

Without a moral foundation of God’s universal and unchanging Law, what does freedom produce, and what do free people demand of a representative government? Right now mothers are free to have their unborn children assassinated, as long as the assassin has the right professional license. In some U.S. states, with the advent of so-called “same-sex ‘marriage’”, the word “marriage” has finally become utterly meaningless, not just by rampant divorce and immorality, but by a new legal definition that has no *true* meaning whatsoever; for, we know by revelation that God created marriage as part of human life, and that by it a man and a woman become one flesh; we know that He blesses marriages with children. John Adams has been proved right: “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”

## **2. God’s Law is absent.**

My younger brother argues in one part of his book *Atheist Delusions* that spokesmen for the new Atheist movement have no logical reason to suppose that ethical or moral principles can be sustained by atheism. Indeed, if they managed to free society from what they call “religion,” each succeeding generation would only find itself brought up farther and farther away from any reason whatsoever even so much as to care about ethical considerations of any kind.

I can tell you what a non-religious society would most resemble, even in terms of its ethical standards: It would most resemble the first twenty minutes or so of the movie *2001 A Space Odyssey*, though likely without the apelike appearance of the people—all hairy. If such a society became ordered it would look like all of the tyrannies of recent times, be they the Nazis or Communists. Ideology would exist, but not ideals that we could recognize.

Above all, even the semblance of two very important things, justice and compassion, would vanish away from the structures of an Atheist society, just as these two things were almost entirely absent in every form of pagan religion known to the real academic discipline of History. Whether the *Suhteas* of India, the strangulation of emperor's widows in China as late as the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, the daily human sacrifices on Aztec altars, or even centuries before that, the mass human sacrifices by fire among the Celts in the Wicker Man ceremonies, pagan religions have proven themselves to be cruel. Atheism fares no better than paganism, as the Communist regimes demonstrated. They had their very large numbers of human sacrifices too, sacrifices to the god of the State and of ideology that exists in isolation from an absolute moral code from the Divine Lawgiver.

It is safe to say, on the basis of history, that the Church created compassion as a social and cultural norm. Today, we expect to find hospitals and medicine in any inhabited place. We expect courts of law to be about, at the very least, some effort towards justice for all. But, why should we expect these things? If we raise successive generations without a Church that can say, *Thus saith [SETH] the Lord*, we may well expect nothing but cruelty in place of compassion and the exercise of raw power in place of justice.

### **3. We are all missionaries here and now.**

“Here,” because we are not living in a Christian culture, except insofar as it is a memory, a memory which cannot long sustain influence over the population. “Now,” because we must act wisely in light of the times.

We have not yet begun to think of ourselves as missionaries, however. We live with the illusions that everybody knows the Gospel, that the churches are filled everywhere, and that most children are raised to know the Ten Commandments and to believe in God.

And, let me be clear. Evangelism is always the mission of the Church, in every place and time. We cannot assume that people know the *Lord* of the Church simply because they have church membership somewhere. But, as it is, if we are to be effective in our own country in this, our generation, it is time to wake up and be realistic about what has happened to the culture all around us.

Ideally, we will embrace the reality of where and when we are as an opportunity to serve God. I do not pretend to have all the answers for the positively best way to present our message. I welcome ideas. But, more important than a solid program of evangelism is the foundation for making the effort; that is, the belief in each heart that the Christ we know, the Gospel we believe, and the Church in which we have found both truth and valid sacraments to meet the needs of our own souls, is so good that we must share this wealth. What matters first is that this practical and vital part of our faith is the unshakable conviction of each heart.

“Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.”

It helps a great deal if we know that here, in Christ, is the food and drink of eternal life, the word and ministry of reconciliation with God, and the only true medicine for the soul. Practically speaking, for those of us who have decided to *Continue* the Anglican Way, now it is high time to move forward beyond the legitimate concerns of self-interest. Compelling people to come into God’s house, if we understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is a duty of love. If we are to compel them, charity must compel us.

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The Rev’d Robert Hart<sup>viii</sup>

July 3, 2011

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<sup>i</sup> “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* xxvii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

<sup>ii</sup> This sermon was originally written on the Epistle at Mass on the Second Sunday after Trinity.

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

<sup>iv</sup> *II Kings* 4:8-17 (KJV).

<sup>v</sup> *St. Luke* 14:12-24 (KJV).

<sup>vi</sup> *I John* 3:17-18 (KJV).

<sup>vii</sup> *St. Luke* 14:16-24.

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