

Sermon for Morning Prayer
The Third Sunday Before Advent
(Trinity XXII, 2009)

Lessons:ⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twelfth Verse of the first Chapter of Habakkuk.ⁱⁱ

“Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O LORD, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction. Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he? And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them? They take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag: therefore they rejoice and are glad. Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag; because by them their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous. Shall they therefore empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations?

“I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved. And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

“ . . .

“Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil! Thou hast consulted shame to thy house by cutting off many people, and hast sinned against thy soul. For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.

“Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stablisheth a city by iniquity! Behold, is it not of the LORD of hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity? For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the thirty-fifth Verse of the twelfth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Luke.ⁱⁱⁱ

“. . . Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.

“Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all? And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath. But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “[L]et . . . ye yourselves [be] like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.”^{iv}

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

Introduction:

In today's First Lesson, Habakkuk employs the image of a city sentinel, standing upon a watch tower on the city walls. The watchman is keeping a lookout for something important that is to come, such as the expected arrival of an important visitor, perhaps a visiting sovereign: "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch" ^v

Homily:

In this case, what the watchman is looking out for is the coming of the Lord. This is also the theme of part of today's Second Lesson, where Our Lord used a marriage celebration as the metaphor for His relationship to His Church. Nor was this the only time He used this particular figure of speech; just recall the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, some of whom were prepared for the bridegroom's coming and went into the feast and some of whom were not prepared to wait for him and so were left outside. ^{vi}

Or think of the parable of the king who held a wedding feast for his son. First, he sent his servants to scour the highways and byways for people to replace the invited guests who ignored his invitation to the feast, ^{vii} then he ejected from that feast the guest who came improperly dress.

All of these images convey to us that those who wish to accompany Our Lord into His Kingdom will not be warned of the time when they will be called to Him, so they must be ever watchful and adequately prepared for it. ^{viii}

As St. Mark wrote, "Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things come to pass, till all these things be done." ^{ix} Many in the first generation of Christians read this message not as a general warning that the Lord may come at any time, so that we must always be prepared for Him, but as a promise that they themselves would see the Second Coming, the end of this age, within their own lifetimes. However, as St. Matthew warns us, "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. . . . Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." ^x The same message is conveyed in the Gospels of St. Mark ^{xi} and St. Luke as well:

“Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.”^{xii}

“Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching. . . .”^{xiii} Those who are prepared will receive their reward: “[V]erily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.”^{xiv} The clear implication of this, however, is that those who are not prepared when the time comes will be excluded from that reward, like the foolish virgins who finally returned, after refilling their lamps, to find the door barred against them, and the man who was thrown out of the feast for being improperly garbed.

“And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. . . . Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.”^{xv}

We usually think of these passages of Scripture, and of their message, as applying primarily to Our Lord’s Second Coming, that is, to the end of the entire created order. However, they have another application and that is to each of us as individuals. Like the rich man who planned to expand his estate, only to be told that he was to die that same night,^{xvi} we do not know when we will be called as individuals to stand before Our Lord and to give an account of ourselves. So we must always be ready to do that; when it comes, it will be too late for us to start preparing ourselves.

We had a graphic illustration of this truth only a few days ago, when a soldier,^{xvii} whom his comrades were entitled to trust as one of themselves, brutally massacred thirteen innocent victims and grievously wounded nearly forty more, all in the midst of a heavily-guarded Army base.^{xviii} Whether he was merely deranged, or whether as seems possible he was a religiously-motivated terrorist, or whether he was a bit of both, his victims had no warning of the fate that was about to befall them. The same, or something similar, could happen to any of the rest of us at any time.

In response to this uncertainty about the timing of an event that is itself certain, our best response is prayer. First, we may, and should, pray that the hazards of this world will be reduced, especially by the coming of Christ into the hearts of the wicked who create so many of those hazards:

For the Conversion of Mohammedans and all who know not Christ.^{xix}

ALMIGHTY God, our heavenly Father, who in thy goodness hast caused the light
A of the Gospel to shine in our land: Extend thy mercy, we beseech thee, to the nations of the world that still walk in darkness. Enlighten the Moslems with the knowledge of thy truth; and grant that the Gospel of salvation may be made known in all lands, that the heart of the peoples may be turned unto thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

For ourselves, we can, and should, always pray as well, that we will be steadfast in faith when our own times come:

THE Almighty Lord, who is a most strong tower to all those who put their trust in
T him, to whom all things in heaven, in earth, and under the earth, do bow and obey; Be now and evermore *our* defence; and make *us* know and feel, that there is none other Name under heaven given to man, in whom, and through whom, thou mayest receive health and salvation, but only the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. *Amen.*^{xx}

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The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister^{xxi}
November 8, 2009.

ⁱ *Psalms and Lessons for the Church Year (1943),
THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xl (PECUSA 1928/1943).*

ⁱⁱ *Habakkuk 1:12—2:4, 9-14 (KJV).*

ⁱⁱⁱ *St. Luke 12:35-48 (KJV).*

^{iv} *St. Luke 12:35a & 36 (KJV).*

^v *Habakkuk 2:1a (KJV).*

^{vi} *St. Matthew 25:1-13.*

^{vii} *St. Matthew 22:1-10.*

^{viii} *St. Matthew 22:11-14.*

^{ix} *St. Mark 13:30 (KJV).*

^x *St. Matthew 24:42 & 44 (KJV).*

^{xi} *St. Mark 13:32-37.*

^{xii} *St. Luke 12:35-36 (KJV).*

^{xiii} *St. Luke 12:37a (KJV).*

^{xiv} *St. Luke 12:37b (KJV).*

^{xv} *St. Luke 12:38 & 40 (KJV).*

^{xvi} *St. Luke 12:16-20.*

^{xvii} *Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan, MC USA.*

^{xviii} *Fort Hood, Texas.*

^{xix} *Prayers and Thanksgivings, THE SCOTTISH BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 70 (1929).*

^{xx} *The Order for the Visitation of the Sick, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 314 (PECUSA 1928/1943).*

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