

## SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

### Lessons:<sup>i</sup>

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the sixth Verse of the second Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.<sup>ii</sup>

“Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people the house of Jacob, because they be replenished from the east, and are soothsayers like the Philistines, and they please themselves in the children of strangers. Their land also is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land is also full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots: Their land also is full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made: And the mean man boweth down, and the great man humbleth himself: therefore forgive them not.

“Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low: And upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan [BAY-shan],<sup>iii</sup> And upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up, And upon every high tower, and upon every fenced wall, And upon all the ships of Tarshish [TARR-shish],<sup>iv</sup> and upon all pleasant pictures. And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. And the idols he shall utterly abolish. And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the fourteenth Verse of the twenty-fifth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Matthew.<sup>v</sup>

“For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

**Text:**

From the Second Lesson: “His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.’”<sup>vi</sup> In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

## **Homily:**

Anyone who has been in the Church for any length of time has probably heard this particular parable several times. And anyone who has heard it had undoubtedly recognized its essential message, which is that the Lord has charged us to be profitable stewards. That is, He not only wants us to preserve, and return to him undiminished, whatever it may be which he has entrusted us, but He wishes us to increase the quantity He has given us.

This lesson applies in every area of our lives, both public and private. For this, it is useful to remember the dual meanings of the word “talent”. In the parable, the talent was a unit of weight, which, when the material being weighed was gold or silver bullion, represented wealth. But, in part because of this particular parable, the word has also come to mean the particular intellectual, artistic, and physical skills, gifts, and abilities with which each of us is endowed from birth. And all these things, whether wealth, or worldly goods, or inborn abilities, are to be employed in the service of Our Lord.

In our private lives, the Lord does not wish us only to maintain the amount of faith with which He has gifted us; He wishes us to increase our faith by habit and exercise, so that we leave this earth as people of greater faith than we entered it. He certainly wishes us to be at least as charitable and caring as we have ever been, but He does not wish us just to maintain that level of concern for our fellows. Instead, He wishes us to possess and exercise a constantly increasing degree of care and concern for those in need, those who are less fortunate than we are, and those to whom we are in a position to reach out and assist.

This is true of every other area of our private lives, whether it be the amount of love we feel and demonstrate, or the quantity of patience we habitually employ, or whatever else may be considered. In other words, the Lord expects us constantly to be struggling to be better people.

In our public lives, the same principles also apply. Each of us should assume responsibility for some area of the Church’s life and

operations, as part of what the Prayer Book calls “our bounden duty and service”,<sup>vii</sup> whether it is the coffee urn at the after-service social hour, or the fundraising effort for a new parish hall, or being elected to some office in the parish, the diocese, or the province, or something else.

Most often, these tasks come to us because we develop a growing awareness that no one else is doing them and therefore that, unless we ourselves take them on, they will not get done. This series of lay readers’ sermons, by the way, is a classic example of just that process of being convicted by one’s own observations of unattended-to tasks.

But once we do take on – then we must endeavor not only to maintain that area of responsibility in at least as good a condition as it was in when we took it over, but to improve its operations, to increase its contribution to the overall life of the Church, and to maximize, in any way that is given to us thereby to do, the growth and spread of the Kingdom of God.

This is just as true, for example, of our basic membership in the Church itself. For so long as we are members, we should not be content that our parish maintains the overall membership that appears in its Register, or even that its average Sunday attendance at services remains the same. It is certainly necessary for it to do those things, but for us to be faithful servants of Our Lord, we must bend every effort, strain every sinew, to increase those numbers.

This is because every person who is not on our membership rolls, every person who is not attending our services, is a measure of how we have failing to go out into the world, of how we have not taught all the nations, and of how we have fallen short in baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.<sup>viii</sup>

## **Conclusion:**

So let us go out and use our talents, in both senses of that word, in the service of Our Lord, that, at the end of time, He may say to each of us, “‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master’”.<sup>ix</sup>

Then we need not fear hearing instead, “You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed, and gather where I have not winnowed.... [C]ast the worthless servant into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.”<sup>x</sup>

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The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister<sup>xi</sup>  
February 13, 2011.

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

<sup>ii</sup> *Isaiah 2:6-19 (KJV).*

<sup>iii</sup> *W. MURRAY SEVERANCE, PRONOUNCING BIBLE NAMES 21 (Holman Bible Publishers, 1985).*

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid. 74, alt.*

<sup>v</sup> *St. Matthew 25:14-29 (KJV).*

<sup>vi</sup> *St. Matthew 25:21 (RSV).*

<sup>vii</sup> *THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 81 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

<sup>viii</sup> *St. Matthew 28:19.*

<sup>ix</sup> *St. Matthew 25:21 (RSV).*

<sup>x</sup> *St. Matthew 25:26, 30 (RSV).*

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