

Sermon for Morning Prayer The Sixteenth Sunday After Trinity

I. Lessons:ⁱ

A. The First Lesson: Here beginneth the thirty-sixth Verse of the thirty-second Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah.ⁱⁱ

“And now therefore thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning this city, whereof ye say, It shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence; Behold, I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely: And they shall be my people, and I will be their God: And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul. For thus saith the LORD; Like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

B. The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-fifth Verse of the eleventh Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Romans.ⁱⁱⁱ

“... For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion [**ZYE-unn**] the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes. For the

gifts and calling of God are without repentance. For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

II. Text:

From the Second Lesson:

“‘The Deliverer will come from Zion,
He will banish ungodliness from Jacob’;
‘and this will be my covenant with them
when I take away their sins.’”^{iv}

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

III. Introduction:

A preacher who speaks only of pleasant things, of positive developments, of comforting devotional practices, of the niceties of Church doctrine, is shirking his duties. Every so often, he must leave his “comfort zone” and speak clearly about some of the hard, difficult, and uncomfortable realities of the Christian profession.

I have quoted previously the famous story attributed to the famously taciturn 30th President of the United States, whose wife was said to have asked him what the preacher’s topic had been at church one Sunday. “Sin” is supposed to have been his monosyllabic answer.

Grace Coolidge supposedly continued, “What did he have to say about it?” “Silent Cal” is said to have responded, “He was agin’ it.”

IV. Theme:

Today’s Lessons are one of those occasions that really leaves us no option but to address the issue of *Sin*. Nor, unlike Calvin Coolidge’s pastor, can we responsibly pass that topic off merely by saying we are opposed to it. We really owe our people a bit more exploration and exposition than that, preferably some beginnings of ideas on how to cope with the realities of Sin in their lives.

In today’s First Lesson, Jeremiah raises inescapably the questions of ancient Israel’s tribulations, brought on it by its own misconduct toward God, and of God’s judgements that were visiting upon that erring people, even sending them into harsh exile, until, in His own good time, He redeemed them and brought them home to their own land, there to attempt once again to “live into” their Covenant with Him.

In the Second Lesson, Paul uses the words of Isaiah^v to tell the Romans the immutable truths of sin and redemption.

V. Developement:

There are three things we, as Christians can never afford to forget. The first is that there is, indeed, such a thing as Sin and Sin is ever with us. The second is that we ourselves are so weak in our natures that, no matter how good we think our intentions are, when left to our own unaided devices, we will always fall into Sin. The third is that, for His own inscrutable reasons, God has chosen to lend us His aid so that, united with Him in a Covenant relationship that brings us His presence and assistance, we can have the means of overcoming Sin and so of pleasing Him.

A. Sin is an ever-present reality in the life of each human being.

In another place, Paul told the Romans that “all men sinned”.^{vi} And St. John seconded him: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive

ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”^{vii} This observation is more than borne out by the Old Testament, which is little more than a catalogue of a seemingly endless series of events in which ancient Israel fell away from the path God had laid out for it, separating that nation and each of its members from Him by breaking the terms of its Covenant with Him.

Then, time after time, God sent a prophet to speak on His behalf, recalling His people to His ways and, when they had returned to obedience, forgiving them and restoring them to His favor. Indeed, today’s First Lesson is taken directly from one of those cycles of disobedience, contrition, redemption, and forgiveness. And, time after time, no sooner were the Israelites restored to God’s good graces than they set about affronting Him once again.

These recurring patterns of disobedience, contrition, redemption, and forgiveness give us the clue to the essential nature of Sin: it is disobedience *toward* God which ends in separating the disobedient *from* God.

B. Left to our own natural devices, we will always fall into Sin.

The IXth Article of Religion tells us that we suffer from “Original sin ... the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man ... whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil....”^{viii} St. Paul put it poignantly when he wrote:

“I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing that I hate.... I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me.”^{ix}

As St. James wrote: “[E]ach person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death.”^x

Left on our own, we are helpless in the face of this overwhelming natural predisposition to Sin. However, God has not left us without the *supernatural* help we need.

C. God, for His own purposes, has given us His – quite literally – supernatural aid to overcome our otherwise overwhelming tendency to Sin.

As today's Second Lesson tells us regarding God's dealings with us: "How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!"^{xⁱ} As the New Testament attests in over and over, God has given us the means of overcoming Sin through the sacrifice of His Son, so that "We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings."^{xⁱⁱ}

Indeed, without great distortion the New Testament can be looked at as essentially just a catalogue of such assurances:

"I will remember their sins and their misdeeds no more."^{xⁱⁱⁱ} "[I]f he has committed sins, he will be forgiven."^{x^{iv}} "[T]he blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."^{x^v}

As we are reminded each time we assist at the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Eucharist: "[I]f anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins...."^{x^{vi}} So, we are told, "[Y]our sins are forgiven for his sake."^{x^{vii}}

VI. Conclusion:

So let us cleanse our thoughts and our hearts and approach the most holy Altar of God, laying before Him our inadequacies and weaknesses and appealing sincerely for His aid to overcome them. Remember always that, by offering His only-begotten Son as reparation for our sins, He "made there (by his one oblation of himself once offered) a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world...."^{x^{viii}}

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

ⁱⁱ *Jeremiah 32: 36-42 (KJV).*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Romans 11:25-36 (KJV).*

^{iv} *James 11: 26b-27 (RSV).*

^v *Isaiah 59: 20-21 and 27: 9.*

^{vi} *Romans 5: 12b (RSV).*

^{vii} *I John 1: 8 (RSV).*

^{viii} *"Of Original or Birth-Sin", Articles of Religion, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 604 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

^{ix} *Romans 7: 15-20 (RSV).*

^x *James 1: 14-15 (RSV).*

^{xi} *Romans 11: 33b (RSV).*

^{xii} *Articles of Religion, Article XI "Of the Justification of Man", THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 605 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

^{xiii} *Hebrews 10: 17 (RSV).*

^{xiv} *James 5: 15b (RSV).*

^{xv} *I John 1: 7b (RSV).*

^{xvi} *I John 2: 1b (RSV).*

^{xvii} *I John 2: 12b (RSV).*

^{xviii} *The Order for The Administration of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion, The Book of Common Prayer 80 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

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