

Sermon for Morning Prayer **The Twenty-Third Sunday after Trinity**

I. Lessons.ⁱ

A. The First Lesson: Here beginneth the sixty-fourth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.ⁱⁱ

“Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence, As when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence! When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence. For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him. Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways: behold, thou art wroth; for we have sinned: in those is continuance, and we shall be saved. But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities. But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand.

“Be not wroth very sore, O LORD, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people. Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste. Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O LORD? wilt thou hold thy peace, and afflict us very sore?”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

B. The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-third Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Matthew.

“Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

II. Text.

From the Second Lesson: “[H]e that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.”ⁱⁱⁱ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

III. Introduction:

Here in the United States, and here in Louisiana, we have just finished the annual Fall season of civil elections. The successful candidates crow their majorities and the unsuccessful ones lick their wounds, but they are not the real winners and losers. The real winners and losers are the people who, in theory, will be represented by the new office holders, and those people must now wait to see whether this time they have, in fact, won or lost.

For Christians, the question whether we have won or lost in this past election will be answered, at least in part, by the extent to which the leaders thus selected show themselves to conform to the Christian

concept of leadership. This season, when political success and failure are in the air, when so many have offered themselves for the people's selection as secular leaders and when some have been so selected, is therefore an appropriate time to consider the Christian concept of leadership.

IV. Theme.

The Christian who wishes to understand the Christian approach to leadership should, of course, look to Scripture. There he will find one theory or concept of New Testament leadership expounded. That concept is further illustrated as it applies to three interrelated areas of Christian life: in the family, in the local congregation of the Church, and in the wider Church.

That is, Scripture teaches us about the leadership of a father in his family, of a pastor in his congregation and of a bishop in his diocese. In each case, the leadership concerned is, in modern eyes, a paradoxical sort of leadership, for it is simultaneously leadership and servanthood.

V. Developement.

A. The Father, as Leader in his Family, is Servant of his Family.

St. Paul told the Ephesians, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it...."^{iv} Thus in the fifth chapter of that Epistle, Paul directs wives to love and submit themselves to their husbands and directs husbands to love and care for, or lead, their wives. What is the spirit in which this leadership of the husband, so contrary to late 20th Century agenda of social engineering, is to be exercised? Paul tells us it is to be modeled on the relationship of Christ and His Church. In this model, the husband is to prize and care for his wife above all other things, as Christ loved and cherished His Church.

This love, however, is a self- sacrificing love. Paul pointedly reminds husbands that, at need, Christ gave himself as a sacrifice for the well-being of His Church.^v The obvious purpose of this reminder is to

teach husbands that, at need, they are to give themselves as sacrifices to preserve their wives. So, indeed, it has been understood; just remember those poignant, and all too true, stories of husbands standing on the deck of the *Titanic*, watching their wives pull away to safety in the all-too-few lifeboats.

So from Ephesians we learn that the basic Christian model of headship or leadership is Christ's self-sacrificing love of His Church. There we further learn that model applies particularly to husbands and fathers. Thus in the words of today's Second Lesson, he that is greatest in the family must be its servant.^{vi}

B. A Parish Clergyman, as Leader in a Congregation, is Father of that Congregation and is Therefore its Servant.

As St. Paul told Timothy, "Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well."^{vii} At the time Paul wrote, there was generally only one church in each city, headed by its pastor-bishop and served by his deacons. Thus the ordained parochial clergy consisted primarily of deacons and so Paul directs his disciple to choose leaders for the local church congregations under the title deacon. Significantly, he further directs that these parochial clergymen will be selected on the model of father of families.

In fact, family fatherhood is not merely a pattern that illustrates the qualifications for the parochial ministry, it is a prerequisite for it. For not only is the congregation to look at a postulant to see if he possesses the same qualities of nurture, leadership and self-sacrifice as are needed by a successful father of a normal human family, that congregation is directed to judge the postulant's father-like qualities by looking at his actual exercise of them in his own family.

This, incidentally, is one of the theological and practical problems with the idea that developed rather late in the life of the Western Church, that the ordained clergy should be celibate. If a man is to remain unmarried, as the Western Rite of the Roman Church now demands, then that man cannot have an actual family in which he exercises the headship and servanthood of its father. Thus no congregation or bishop can ever judge his fitness for the rôle of "parent" of a congregational

“family” by the test that scripture lays down, that is, according to his skill and diligence as an actual human husband and father.

But we must not forget St. Paul and the Ephesians. According to First Timothy, the deacon is to be selected according to his qualities as an actual husband and father, and according to Ephesians such an husband and father must model himself on the self-sacrificing servanthood of Christ toward his Church. Then, linking the first of those models to the second ultimately means that the ordained parochial clergyman must exhibit toward the congregation of souls entrusted to him that same self-sacrificing servanthood that Christ exhibited toward the entire people of God.

C. A Bishop, as Leader in a Diocese, is Father of that Diocese and is Therefore its Servant.

As St. Paul tells Timothy, “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, ... One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)”^{viii} Paul declares the standard for headship and leadership in the wider church to be the same as in the local congregation. A bishop, like a deacon, must not only exhibit the qualities of a good husband and father, but a candidate for the episcopate is to be judged according to his actual performance of those qualities, demonstrated in the course of his rôle of husband and father of an actual family.

As in the case of a deacon, then, the model of human fatherhood automatically invokes the model of Christ and His Church. The bishop’s headship, as the deacon’s and the family father’s, is to be an headship of self-sacrificing servanthood.

VI. Conclusion.

This, then, is the scriptural standard for Christian leadership. Firstly, it is in its nature a servanthood, exercised in love for the care and benefit of those led, a servanthood that is at need self-sacrificing, even unto death, as Christ gave Himself for the well-being of His people. Secondly, a leader’s possession of the necessary qualities is to be

measured for the degree to which it approaches Christ's ideal, judged according to that leader's actual performance as a spouse and as a parent of a family.

To illustrate the significance of this ideal, let me put to each of you a question: If all of the people voting in this past election had judged each of the choices before them, whether a candidate for local, state or national office, according to this Christian standard of fatherhood and servanthood, demonstrated in actual family life, would the results of the election have been the same?

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

ⁱⁱ *Isaiah 64: 1-12 (KJV).*

ⁱⁱⁱ *St. Matthew 23: 11-12 (KJV).*

^{iv} *Ephesians, 5: 25 (KJV).*

^v *Ephesians 5: 25b (KJV).*

^{vi} *St. Matthew 23: 11 (KJV).*

^{vii} *1 Timothy 3: 12 (KJV).*

^{viii} *1 Timothy 3: 2-5 (KJV).*

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