

# SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

## The Second Sunday after Easter

The Rev'd Warren E. Shaw, Rector

### Lessons:<sup>1</sup>

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the twenty-first Verse of the fourth Chapter of Baruch.<sup>2</sup>

“... Be of good cheer, O my children, cry unto the Lord, and he will deliver you from the power and hand of the enemies. For my hope is in the Everlasting, that he will save you; and joy is come unto me from the Holy One, because of the mercy which shall soon come unto you from the Everlasting our Saviour. For I sent you out with mourning and weeping: but God will give you to me again with joy and gladness for ever. Like as now the neighbours of Sion have seen your captivity: so shall they see shortly your salvation from our God which shall come upon you with great glory, and brightness of the Everlasting. My children, suffer patiently the wrath that is come upon you from God: for thine enemy hath persecuted thee; but shortly thou shalt see his destruction, and shalt tread upon his neck. My delicate ones have gone rough ways, and were taken away as a flock caught of the enemies. Be of good comfort, O my children, and cry unto God: for ye shall be remembered of him that brought these things upon you. For as it was your mind to go astray from God: so, being returned, seek him ten times more. For he that hath brought these plagues upon you shall bring you everlasting joy with your salvation. Take a good heart, O Jerusalem: for he that gave thee that name will comfort thee.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the seventh Verse of the third Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Philippians.<sup>3</sup>

“... But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency

of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing. *Brethren, be followers together with me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)*”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

### **Homily:**

The passage from Philippians that is today’s Second Lesson contains a word that is probably going to get me in trouble. It’s a Greek word that, to my knowledge, is not used elsewhere in the New Testament.

The reason it’s likely to get me in trouble is that there are two Greek scholars in the congregation who know a lot more about the language of the New Testament than I do. But I’m not afraid of them. They are my friends and are not likely to embarrass me by correcting me

in public. They will do it privately and you will never know that I was wrong.

The word I'm referring to is *skubalon*, which the King James Version translates as “dung” and the Revised Standard Version translates as “refuse”. The New International Version translates it as “rubbish”. But there is one expert who contends that the word refers to the part of the meal that is left over and given to the family pet after the family has eaten—the scraps, if you will. That is the definition that I choose to go with.

In Jesus' day there were, of course, stray dogs that roamed the streets and ate whatever they could scavenge. To call somebody that kind of a dog was a great insult. But there were also dogs who were family pets and were regularly fed with food left over from the family meal. There is a dog like that in my house. She gets a lot of *skubalon*.

The reason I like that meaning is that it recalls an incident told by both Saints Matthew and Mark. While Jesus was in Gentile territory for a little R and R, a Canaanite woman approached Him. She asked Him to heal her daughter and Jesus replied that it was not proper to take the children's food and give it to the family pet.

That reply reflects a mind set common in First Century Jewish culture. The Gentiles were entitled to a share of God's blessings, but only after the Jews had received them first. That was especially true when it came to the knowledge of God's laws. The Gentiles were likened to the dogs that hung around the table and were grateful for whatever leftovers the Jews gave them.

But this woman really wanted Jesus to heal her daughter. She was willing to accept an inferior position in the order of things, but she still insisted that she had certain rights: “Even the dogs”, she said, “get to eat what falls from the master's table.”

We recall that story in the Prayer of Humble Access that we say just before we receive Holy Communion, and we put ourselves in the

position of the Gentile supplicant: “We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs from under thy table.”

This woman probably spoke an Aramaic dialect, as Jesus did. Saints Matthew and Mark tell the story in Greek and they have her using the Greek word for a very tiny portion—a crumb, as it is translated in English. The idea is the same. The Gentiles rank below the Jews in the cosmic order and have to settle for something less than what the Jews have been given.

St. Paul, in today’s lesson, turns that order around. He cites his Jewish ancestry; his proficiency in knowing, interpreting, and following the Jewish law; his status in the Jewish community; and he says all that is just so much *skubalon*. It’s the kind of stuff that the Jews have to settle for while the Gentiles get to feast on something so much better. That something is the death and resurrection of Christ.

It is no longer the Gentiles who are the dogs that wait under the table. The death and resurrection of Christ changed all that. It is the Jews—who cling to the Law and refuse to accept what God has done in the person of Jesus—who are in the canine position. We who believe in Christ are invited to sit at His table and be fed by the spiritual food that God Himself has prepared and blessed.

We no longer have to depend on our own efforts to obtain God’s favor. His beloved Son, in whom He is well pleased, has united Himself with us, paid the penalty for our sins, and gone ahead of us into death and Resurrection to prepare a place for us to live forever with Him in glory.

It is no longer our own merits but the merits of Christ that we have to offer to God. The Resurrection changes everything, and St. Paul is willing to sacrifice everything to participate in its benefits.

The Law of Moses started out as Ten Commandments. By the time of Jesus it had grown to such a complex of laws and interpretations that only someone who devoted his life to studying it could understand, much less observe it. Paul was such a man before he was confronted

and converted by the risen Christ. After he became an Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul was unwilling to inflict such an onerous requirement on his converts. So he brought the matter before the council of Apostles and succeeded in getting a ruling that separated the moral law from the rest the Jewish law. That separation is reflected in the Articles of Religion, which are published in the back of the Book of Common Prayer. Article VII of those Articles reads as follows:

“Although the Law given from God by Moses, as touching Ceremonies and Rites, do not bind Christian men, nor the Civil precepts thereof ought of necessity to be received in any commonwealth; yet notwithstanding, no Christian man whatsoever is free from the obedience of the Commandments which are called Moral.”

Even the Sabbath Day was changed for Christians from a day of rest on Saturday to a celebration of the Resurrection on Sunday. We are here today because the Resurrection of Jesus changes everything.

In the Gospels, Jesus predicts that the values of this world will be reversed in the world to come. He says that the last will be first and the first will be last. He says that wealthy people will have a hard time getting into the new order of things. He says that harlots and other outcasts of society will enter the Kingdom of God ahead of the righteous and virtuous who depend on their own merits. Those prophecies are fulfilled in the Resurrection of Jesus.

Because he realizes that the resurrection changes everything, the Apostle urges us all to follow his example and to seek the company of others who do the same: “Be followers together with me,” he says, “and take note of those who live after my example.”

All of the things that are valued in this world, including life itself, are so much garbage to be cast aside, says the Apostle. Those who feed on it are referred to in the extended passage as “enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is their shame, who mind earthly things.” We have to be different from them. We have to be different because the resurrection of Jesus changes everything.

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<sup>1</sup> *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

<sup>2</sup> *Baruch* 4:21-30 (KJV).

<sup>3</sup> *Philippians* 3:7-19 (KJV). The passage assigned in the table of lessons ends with verse 16 but the argument of the author is based on Paul's thoughts as those continue through verse 19.