

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

Easter Day

The Rev'd Warren E. Shaw, Rector

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-fifth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.²

“O LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth. For thou hast made of a city an heap; of a defenced city a ruin: a palace of strangers to be no city; it shall never be built. Therefore shall the strong people glorify thee, the city of the terrible nations shall fear thee. For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall. Thou shalt bring down the noise of strangers, as the heat in a dry place; even the heat with the shadow of a cloud: the branch of the terrible ones shall be brought low.

“And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it.

“And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-eighth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Matthew.³

“In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you. And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.

“And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

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“Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the first Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John: “And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.”⁴ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

Easter is not an isolated event. It has a context—a theological context and a biblical context. The Easter event was prefigured in the creation. It was predicted by the prophets. It was proclaimed by the Apostles. It will be consummated in the Day of Judgment and in the heart of every individual.

Throughout the Old Testament, judgment and death are associated with darkness. Three days of thick darkness was one of the plagues that God visited on Egypt to punish the Pharaoh for holding the Jews in slavery. Joel, Amos, and Zephaniah all foresee the coming Day of Judgment as a day of profound darkness. The darkness that fell over the earth on Good Friday represents that judgment.

Light, on the other hand, is associated with salvation and life. “Then shall thy light break forth as the morning,” says Isaiah, “and thy healing shall spring forth speedily. Thy righteousness shall go before thee, and the glory of the Lord shall follow thee.”

“The Lord shall enlighten my darkness,” says the Psalmist, and in another place, “Unto the upright, there ariseth light in the darkness.” The Bible begins with the unformed earth in a state of darkness. But the Spirit of God hovered over it. The Word of God entered in, and from the watery darkness emerged light and life.

In the Incarnation, the Christmas story, the same Spirit of God hovered over the Virgin Mary. The Word of God entered into the darkness of her womb, and from that darkness emerged light and life.

On Good Friday, the Word of God entered into the darkness of death, and, on Easter, light and life emerged from the tomb. It is as St. John says in the opening verses of his Gospel, “The light shined in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.”

The important thing for us is that the same Spirit that hovered over the unformed earth, and hovered over the womb of the Blessed Virgin, and hovered over the Cross, and hovered over the tomb, is hovering over this place right now.

The same Word of God that entered the darkness of the unformed earth and brought forth light, and entered the womb of the Virgin and brought forth life, and entered the darkness of death and brought forth light and life, that Word, the living Word of God, will also enter the darkness of every heart that is open today to receive Him and that will bring light out of that darkness and life out of death.

Hell is a place that God has set aside for those who will not receive His word. It is a place of darkness and everlasting death. There is no need for anyone to go there. Jesus already went there and broke down the gates.

St. Paul says, “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

So now it's up to you. If you look deep into your heart and see darkness and death, what will you do? Will you open your heart to receive the Word of God?

The Day of Judgment is also the day of salvation, and that day is today.

Alleleujah, Christ is risen!

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St. David's Anglican Catholic Church
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¹ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xx (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² Isaiah 25:1-9 (KJV).

³ St. Matthew 28:1-10, 16-20 (KJV).

⁴ St. John 1:5 (KJV).