

**Sermon for Morning Prayer:
The Third Sunday after the Epiphany**

The Reverend Warren E. Shaw, Priest Associate

Psalm 42. Quemadmodum.

LIKE as the hart desireth the water-brooks, * so longeth my soul after thee, O God.

My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God: * when shall I come to appear before the presence of God?

My tears have been my meat day and night, * while they daily say unto me, Where is now thy God?

Now when I think thereupon, I pour out my heart by myself; * for I went with the multitude, and brought them forth into the house of God;

In the voice of praise and thanksgiving, * among such as keep holy-day.

Why art thou so full of heaviness, O my soul? * and why art thou so disquieted within me?

O put thy trust in God; * for I will yet thank him, which is the help of my countenance, and my God.

My soul is vexed within me; * therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, from Hermon and the little hill.

One deep calleth another, because of the noise of thy water-floods; * all thy waves and storms are gone over me.

The LORD will grant his loving-kindness in the daytime; * and in the night season will I sing of him, and make my prayer unto the God of my life.

I will say unto the God of my strength, Why hast thou forgotten me? * why go I thus heavily, while the enemy oppresseth me?

My bones are smitten asunder as with a sword, * while mine enemies that trouble me cast me in the teeth;

Namely, while they say daily unto me, * Where is now thy God?

Why art thou so vexed, O my soul? * and why art thou so disquieted within me?

O put thy trust in God; * for I will yet thank him, which is the help of my countenance, and my God.

Lessons:

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the eighth Verse of the forty-first Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.

“... But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend. Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away.

“Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. ... When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together: That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the LORD hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fourth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John.

“When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,) He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee. And he must needs go through Samaria. Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink. (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.) Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle? Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the

water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

The Evening Prayer lectionary for Tuesday of this week picks up where the second lesson for this morning leaves off. In the extended reading, the Samaritan woman that Jesus meets at the well brings up the question of the proper place to worship God. “Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.” The mountain she is referring to is Mount Gerazim, which is where the Samaritans had built a temple in competition with the temple in Jerusalem.

The question she raises coordinates nicely with the Psalm for today, which deals with the same question. Where is God to be found, and where should I go to worship him?

People are taunting the psalmist because he has been separated from the temple, and he cannot point to it as the place where God is to be found. “They continually say unto me, ‘Where is now thy God’” All he can do in response is remember how it was when he opened the doors to the temple and let the people in. All he can do is hope and believe that God will allow him to do that again. “O send out thy light and thy truth”, he says, “that they may lead me and bring me unto thy holy hill and to thy dwelling.”

That prayer is answered in the person of Jesus Christ.

In St. John’s Gospel. Jesus says, “I am the light.” He also says, “I am the truth.” He also says, “No one comes to the Father but by me.”

Jesus is not only the light and the truth sent by God to show the way to the Father, He is, in very fact, the place where, in St. Paul’s words. “All the fulness of God was pleased to dwell.” Jesus is the true temple, the place where God in His fullness is to be found.

The question the psalmist raises, and the Samaritan woman raises, and that many people today raise, assumes that God can be located in time and space. It

assumes that God cannot be in more than one place at any given time. So Jesus rightly rejects the question. “God is spirit,” he says, “and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”

It is the nature of spirit to transcend the limits of time and space. God is the creator of time and space. He can enter His creation, but He cannot be confined within it. So even as all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell in the human body of one man, God was not confined to that one body.

We think that God dwells in heaven, and so He does. But heaven is not a place that can be located by time and space coordinates. Heaven is beyond time and space. It is from everlasting to everlasting. Heaven is simply where God is to be found. To live in heaven is to live in the presence of God. To live in hell is to live apart from Him. To live in hell is to live in exile from the temple. The psalmist felt that he was living in hell because he was away from the temple in Jerusalem, but the temple in which God dwells is not a building or a place. The temple in which God dwells is a person, and that person is Christ. So it is that we pray in the consecration prayer, “that he may dwell in us and we in him.”

In this morning’s first lesson, the prophet Isaiah offers hope to all who are despondent. But he does not promise that God will once again give them access to the temple in Jerusalem. What he promises is that God will help His people wherever they are. In the mountains, in the valleys, in the desert, or in the far countries, God is with His people. The prophet uses the metaphor of providing water. Jesus also uses that metaphor, appropriately, at the well.

“If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, ‘Give me to drink,’ thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.” Jesus is the dispenser of the water of life, and He is the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy that God will provide that life for His people wherever they are.

We are presently confined to time and space because we are only partially spiritual beings. But the God who is pure spirit condescends to come to us in time and space and presents Himself to us in ways that our limited senses can perceive. The water of life is the water of baptism. It is given to us by Christ. The bread and wine of Holy Communion is the spiritual food that sustains us in a hostile world. It is given to us by Christ.

“One deep calleth another,” says the psalmist. St. Paul says, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit.” The initiative is always with the Father. He sent out His light and His truth in the person of the one man who is able to lead us and all men to God’s eternal presence.

Jesus says, “Woman, believe me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father. The true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him.” The woman replies, “I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ; when he is come he will tell us all things.” Jesus replies, “I who speak to thee am he.” That is the answer to the haunting and mocking question, “Where is now thy God.”

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