

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYERⁱ
Independence Day (U.S.A.)ⁱⁱ
(July 4)

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Priest-in-Charge

Lessons:ⁱⁱⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fourth Chapter of the fifth Book of Moses, commonly called Deuteronomy.^{iv}

“Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you. Your eyes have seen what the LORD did because of Baal-peor [**BAY-ull PEA-orr**]: for all the men that followed Baal-peor [**BAY-ull PEA-orr**], the LORD thy God hath destroyed them from among you. But ye that did cleave unto the LORD your God are alive every one of you this day. Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons’ sons; Specially the day that thou stoodest before the LORD thy God in Horeb [**HOAR-ebb**], when the LORD said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children. And ye came near and stood under the mountain; and the mountain burned with fire unto the midst of heaven, with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness. And the

LORD spake unto you out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice. And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone.

“And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go over to possess it.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-sixth Verse of the fourth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Galatians.^v

“... But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith [SETH] the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “[B] brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.”^{vi} In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

“[B]rethren, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.” These women are metaphors; what the Apostle means by the slave or bondwoman is the Jewish Law; what he means by the free woman is the Gospel. Human nature, in its fallen state, is capable of great evil and must be restrained. Left to our own devices we are capable of destroying, not only ourselves but the whole of creation. So God gave us Laws as a kind of damage control.

But God did not intend for even the Jews to live under the Law forever. He intended for them to be guided and controlled by the Law until such time as they were ready to be guided and controlled by His own spirit.

The great prophet Jeremiah said, “The days are coming when I shall make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the House of Judah I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts.”^{vii} St. Paul believed that for those who had been taken up into the death and resurrection of Christ, that day had come.

But there were those in the church, especially in Galatia, who looked to the past rather than the future. They did not see the death and resurrection of Jesus as the beginning of a new creation. They saw the law as the only way that human nature could be controlled. And, what is worse, they saw the Law as a path to salvation. So St. Paul turned to the Old Testament, particularly to that portion known as Torah and extracted a story to establish his point.

The story was about Abraham’s wife and her Egyptian maid and a promise that God made to Abraham. It was a source of great sorrow for Sarah and for her husband that she could not become pregnant. It was important in those days for a man to have a son, not only to inherit his property but also to perpetuate his name and his bloodline. So in order to fulfill her duty and enable her husband to fulfill his duty, Sarah provided a surrogate.

In modern times a couple in that situation might turn to artificial insemination and embryo implantation but in those days that was not an option. So Sarah told Abraham to go in to Hagar, an Egyptian slave who was Sarah’s personal maid, and produce an heir through her.

The important thing to remember is that this was a human solution to a problem. It was, in fact, a common solution in those days. The Ten Commandments, which forbid adultery, had not yet been given, and the only prevailing law was what we call natural law. The perpetuation of the species, which entails the production and protection of children, is one of the primary tenets of natural law. So Sarah did the best she could under the circumstances.

But God had His own solution to the problem. He made a promise that He would open Sarah's womb, in spite of her advanced age, and in His own time and in His own miraculous way, He did exactly that. So, in time, Abraham found himself with two sons. One of them, Ishmael, was the fruit of the womb of a bondwoman. The other, Isaac, was the fruit of the womb of a free woman. To put it another way, Ishmael was the result of doing things the human way; Isaac was the result of a miraculous act of God. And even though Ishmael was older, Isaac was designated as the true heir.

Sarah said to Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son, because the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son Isaac." And God said to Abraham, "In all that Sarah has said harken unto her voice, for in Isaac shall thy descendants be named."

St. Paul picked up on that story and said to the people of the church in Galatia, "We, brethren, are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free."

The Apostle went on to allegorize the two women in the story. He compared Hagar to Jerusalem as it then was, still ruled by men and still under the Law. Sarah he compared to the new Jerusalem, the heavenly city that has yet to be revealed, where God alone rules and where our actions are guided by God's own spirit. That new Jerusalem, which is part of God's new act of creation in Christ, is the mother of all who are born, as St. John puts it, "Not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

Baptism, for Paul as well as for John, represents a second birth, and just as God is our Father, so the Church is our mother. That is why

the Fourth Sunday in Lent, for which this story forms the Epistle, is known in England as “Mothering Sunday,” and on that day the faithful traditionally go to the church in which they were baptized.

But what of those who are born after the flesh and the will of man? Well the story goes on to say that God looked after Hagar and her son after they were expelled, and I am sure it grieves Him to see the enmity that still exists between the descendants of the two sons of Abraham.^{viii}

We Christians of every nationality are the children of Abraham by adoption and grace. We are heirs of the Kingdom of God, the New Jerusalem, which is from above. As long as the promise of that heavenly city remains unfulfilled, a certain amount of law is necessary. But know this. God always fulfills His promises.

The new Jerusalem is coming. It will be revealed in God’s own time as a result of His action and not ours. The new creation began in the death and resurrection of the Son of God, and no matter what actions men may take to perpetuate the old ways, there is no turning back. We are new creatures in Christ, not yet perfected but destined to live with Him in the new Jerusalem under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

“[B]rethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.”

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St. David’s Anglican Catholic Church
Charlottesville, VA
March 18, 2012

ⁱ “Any set of Psalms and Lessons appointed for the evening of any day may be read at the morning service, and any set of morning Psalms and Lessons may be read in the evening.” *Concerning the Service of the Church, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

ⁱⁱ This sermon was originally written on the Epistle for Mass on the Fourth Sunday in Lent, 2012.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Psalms and Lessons for Special Occasions (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xliii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

^{iv} *Deuteronomy 4:1-14 (KJV).*

^v *Galatians 4:26—5:1 (KJV).*

^{vi} *Galatians 4:31 (KJV).*

^{vii} *Jeremiah 31:33.*

^{viii} *According to the tradition that is accepted by both groups, the descendants of Ishmael are the Arabs and the descendants of Isaac are the Jews.*