

**Sermon for Morning Prayer:
The Third Sunday in Lent**

The Reverend Warren E. Shaw, Priest in Charge

Lessons:ⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the first Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Zechariah [**ZECK-are-eye-uh**].ⁱⁱ

“In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius [**DARR-eye-uss**], came the word of the Lord unto Zechariah [**ZECK-are-eye-uh**], the son of Berechiah [**BEAR-eh-kye-uh**], the son of Iddo [**IH-doe**] the prophet, saying, The Lord hath been sore displeased with your fathers. Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith [**SETH**] the Lord of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith [**SETH**] the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith [**SETH**] the Lord of hosts. Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith [**SETH**] the Lord of hosts; Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith [**SETH**] the Lord. Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever? But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? and they returned and said, Like as the Lord of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us.

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“Then the angel of the Lord answered and said, O Lord of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years? And the Lord answered the angel that talked with me with good words and comfortable words. So the angel that communed with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith [**SETH**] the Lord of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. And I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction. Therefore thus saith [**SETH**] the Lord; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith [**SETH**] the Lord of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem. Cry yet, saying, Thus saith [**SETH**] the Lord of hosts; My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread

abroad; and the Lord shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-seventh Verse of the eighth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Mark.ⁱⁱⁱ

“And Jesus went out, and his disciples, into the towns of Caesarea Philippi [**SAYS-ah-ree-uh FILL-ipp-eye**]: and by the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am? And they answered, John the Baptist: but some say, Elias [**EE-lye-uss**]; and others, One of the prophets. And he saith [**SETH**] unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith [**SETH**] unto him, Thou art the Christ. And he charged them that they should tell no man of him. And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he spake that saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.

“And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

“And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “And he asked them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered him, ‘You are the Christ.’”^{iv} In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

Everybody seems to have his own idea about Jesus. That was true in His day and it is true in ours as well.

In this morning’s New Testament Lesson, Jesus asks His disciples what they are hearing about Him in the general population. They reply that people generally see Him as a prophet and a teacher of morality. Some see Him as a champion of justice for the poor, like John the Baptist. Others see Him as Elijah returned to Earth, which would indicate that the Messiah was about to appear. Nobody seemed to think that Jesus Himself was the Messiah. And that was alright with Him, because He realized that what most people expected of the Messiah was not what He was prepared to offer.

Then Jesus asked His disciples what their opinion was: “Who do you say that I am?” Peter responded, “You are the Messiah.”

So far so good, but it soon became apparent that Peter’s concept of Messiahship was very different from our Lord’s own understanding and was much more in line with the popular ideas of the day. When Jesus began to explain that the Messiah must suffer and be rejected and be killed and rise from the dead, Peter lodged a vigorous objection. That was not at all how he understood Messiahship, and it is not how most people understand it today either.

If you ask most people to day what has to happen in order for evil to be overcome and something resembling the Kingdom of God to be established on Earth, you are likely to get a reply that involves political, economic, and sociological change — the same kind of essentially secular things that Jesus considered in the time He spent in the wilderness before He began His public ministry.

When Peter objected to the concept of a suffering, rejected, and executed Messiah, Jesus recognized in His friend the voice of the tempter, the same voice He had heard in the desert. So He turned away from Peter and looked at the other disciples, literally turning his back on Peter, and said, if I may paraphrase, “Get behind me Satan! You’re not thinking like God, you are thinking like a man.”

This little episode sets the stage for bit of irony in an episode that St. Mark will record later in his Gospel. When Jesus is arrested and put on trial by the religious authorities, Peter follows to see what will happen. While he is lurking outside he is given the opportunity to identify himself as a disciple of the Man he has proclaimed to be the Messiah. He replies that he does not know who Jesus is. And he is right. He did not know then who Jesus was, just as he did not know when Jesus asked the question, “Who do you say that I am?”

Peter thought he knew when Jesus asked the question. Everybody thinks he knows. We all want to make Jesus be what *we* want Him to be: a social reformer, a political activist, a teacher of high moral principles, a visionary, a miracle worker, or maybe just a pathetic voice trying to get people to treat each other better.

There are many today who see Jesus as a kindly messenger of a loving and forgiving God who makes no demands and requires no sacrifices. Still others see Him as a harsh man who doesn’t want anyone to enjoy himself. But it is simply not true that one man’s opinion is as good as another’s, and it certainly is not true that we can remake Jesus into what we would like Him to be. Jesus insists on defining Himself and His mission in His own terms.

I should say He insists on defining His mission in God’s terms, because He is the ever-obedient Son of the Father.

Jesus was sent into the world to die for the sins of the world. He would not be dissuaded by His friends, or by the tempter, or by public expectations. He was the true Israel, the successor to Abraham in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed.

Jesus was not afraid to challenge the assumptions of His own culture and to push aside the demands and expectations of His people. Rejected by men, He was accepted by God. Crucified by men, He was raised from the dead by the power of God. Humiliated by men, He is glorified by the Father.

“Who do you say that I am?” Some day, Jesus will ask that question of every one of us. It took the church almost 400 years to work out a theological answer to that question. But that answer is not the answer Jesus wants. The answer Jesus wants is a very personal answer, and He wants it demonstrated by the way we live. He wants the answer that St. Thomas gave on the octave of Easter in St. John’s gospel: “My Lord and my God.”

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

ⁱⁱ *Zechariah 1:1-6, 12-17 (KJV).*

ⁱⁱⁱ *St. Mark 8:27-9:1 (KJV).*

^{iv} *St. Mark 8:29 (RSV).*