

Sermon for Morning Prayer Palm Sunday

The Reverend Warren E. Shaw, Priest Associate

Lessons:ⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the thirteenth Verse of the fifty-second Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.ⁱⁱ

“Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men: So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.

“Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

“Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a

portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

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

“And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said unto his disciples, Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified. Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas [**KYE-uh-fuss**], And consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him. But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people.

“Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat. But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.

“Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot [**JOO-duss Iss-CARE-ee-ut**], went unto the chief priests, And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.

“Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover? And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples. And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover. Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve. And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord,

is it I? And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me. The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born. Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.

“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives. Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee. Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.

“Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane [**Geth-SEMM-ann-ee**], and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee [**Zebb-uh-DEE**], and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.

“And while he yet spake, lo, Judas [**JOO-duss**], one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders

of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed him. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him. And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear. Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be? In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me. But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.

“And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas [**KYE-uh-fuss**] the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end. Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death; But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses, And said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days. And the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death. Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands, Saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?

“Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one

of them; for thy speech bewrayeth [*bee-RAY-eth*] thee. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

“What will you give me if I deliver him to you?” St. Matthew 26:15 (RSV).

Homily:

Judas is not the only one who has ever entertained such a question. Adam and Eve considered it. Jesus Himself considered it. We have all considered it in one form or another. In its basic form the question comes down to this: What will I get out of it if I betray my God and serve the cause of His adversary?

God’s adversary is a great negotiator. He knows what he wants and he is willing to offer something in exchange for it. That’s the nature of temptation, and Satan is in the temptation business. The devil is a deal maker, and he is very good at it.

In the case of Adam and Eve, in exchange for their betrayal of God’s trust, the devil offered them beauty, food, knowledge and status. “You shall be as gods,” he said, “able to decide for yourselves what is right and what is wrong.” “And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and ate it and gave it to her husband and he ate it with her.”^{iv}

That act of betrayal brought the whole human race under Satan’s jurisdiction, which is to say it made us subject to evil and to death. The devil told us it wouldn’t do that, but the devil is a liar.

In the case of Jesus, the tempter offered food and fame and riches and glory during the Lenten experience in the wilderness. He suggested that Jesus turn stones into bread. Jesus said no. He suggested that Jesus jump off the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem and gain fame and a following by walking away unhurt. When

that didn't work, "The devil took him up onto a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory and said, 'All these things will I give you if you will fall down and worship me.'"

To do that would have meant that Jesus would have betrayed His Father and become subject to evil and death just like Adam and Eve. But Jesus, the second Adam, resisted the temptation and turned down the offer. So the devil withdrew for a while and came back to try again later. And make no mistake Jesus was tempted more than once.

There was one notable episode, for instance, when Peter tried to persuade Jesus not to risk death by going to Jerusalem. Jesus recognized the voice of his friend and disciple as the voice of the tempter and said, "Get out of my way, Satan. You are an obstruction."

Even as He hung on the cross Jesus was tempted to betray his Father and abandon His mission. "Let him come down from the cross," said the religious authorities, "and we will believe in him." Once again Jesus recognized the voice of the tempter and refused the offer.

Sometimes it is threats rather than inducements that the devil uses to get people to change their loyalties. For example, Roman Catholic hospitals in our own day are being threatened with withdrawal of funds and possible de-certification if they continue to refuse to perform abortions. Pharmacists are being threatened with being fired if they refuse to provide the so called "morning after pill". Roman Catholic adoption agencies are threatened with de-licensing if they do not arrange for gay couples to adopt children. Some of those agencies are simply closing up rather act against their consciences. And, of course, there are places in the world where Christians and Jews are actually killed if they refuse to convert to Islam. One such incident was reported in Pakistan last week, and many have been reported in parts of Africa.

Sometimes temptation is nothing more than a desire to stay home or to go to soccer practice on Sunday morning rather than to show up for church. But whatever form the temptation takes, whether inducement or threat, the tempter always offers something that seems desirable at the time. That's how the devil gets his way.

It is said that every man has his price. In The United States Congress, when votes are being rounded up, the question is often asked: “What will it take to get you to vote for this bill?” That question is simply the other side of Judas’s question. The tempter puts it to every one of us every day. What will it take to get you to betray your duty to God, to your family, to your friends, and to yourself?

Peter boasted loudly that he would never deny or abandon Jesus. He would die before he would do such a thing. But when the time came, someone discovered the price of his loyalty. So I put the question to you now and leave you to think about it. What is the price of your loyalty? Would you like more money? Would you like to be more popular? Would you like to move up to a higher station in life? What would it take to get you to betray your Lord?

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

ⁱⁱ Isaiah 52: 13-53: 12 (KJV).

ⁱⁱⁱ St. Matthew 26: 1-75 (KJV).

^{iv} Genesis 3: 6 (RSV).