

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

Palm Sunday

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Rector

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the thirteenth Verse of the fifty-second Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.²

“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.³

“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:

From the Second Lesson: “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement

that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed.”⁴ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

The forces that sent Jesus to his death are still active in the world today: greed, hypocrisy, cowardice, jealousy, cruelty, injustice, abuse of power. These are the handmaids of sin and the vanguard of death.

Jesus faced them all and overcame them. In response to greed He laid aside His divine glory and entered into mortal flesh, not as a rich man or a high official but as a tradesman and a wandering teacher. In response to cowardice, He demonstrated courage. In response to hypocrisy, He exposed it. In response to jealousy, He identified with the outcasts of society. In response to cruelty, He demonstrated compassion. In response to the abuse of power, He refused to call upon the armies of angels awaiting His command to rescue Him from the Cross and wreak vengeance on those who perpetrated the injustice. He prayed for His persecutors instead. His absolute goodness overcame sin and, since death is the consequence of sin, He overcame death as well, not only for Himself but for all who put their trust in Him.

The various characters who appear in the Passion narrative demonstrate the forces I have mentioned. Judas demonstrates greed. Pilate demonstrates both cowardice and injustice. Peter demonstrates both hypocrisy and cowardice in his boast and subsequent denial as well as his flight into hiding when Jesus was led to His death. The religious authorities demonstrate jealousy and hypocrisy as well as injustice. The Soldiers demonstrate cruelty.

We don't have to look far to see these same forces in the world today. All we have to do is look within ourselves. The same handmaids of death lurk within us all, and like those pesky viruses that go into remission from time to time but never leave us completely, they break out in moments of weakness and stress and fatigue and strike us once again.

If we ignore our forces within ourselves, or try to excuse them, they will surely lead us to everlasting death. They are escorts on what Shakespeare calls “the primrose path to the everlasting bonfire.”

But we do not have to do not have to walk that path, and we do not have ignore or deny the sins that infest every human soul. Our lives do not have to be what T. S. Eliot calls “[an] effortless journey to [an] empty land.” We can face our sins, confess them, and lay them upon the one who has overcome them and broken the iron grip of death.

Isaiah says, “He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. Upon Him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed.”

Jesus takes into Himself all the sin, all the evil that is heaped upon Him and absorbs it into Himself. His holiness consumes it. His holiness destroys it. That’s the nature of holiness.

Sin cannot stand in the presence of holiness. That is why people are afraid when confronted with God. They know they are sinful and are afraid they will be destroyed along with their sins. But that only happens to people who hold onto their sins and refuse to be separated from them. For those who decry their sins and lay them on the one who carries them to the Cross, it is only what is evil that is destroyed. What is left is the pure image of God in which we were created.

Next Sunday we will take into ourselves the holiness of Christ, just as He took into himself the sins of the world. As the bread and the wine become part of us, we will become part of Him. Our sinful bodies will be made clean by His Body and our souls washed through His most precious Blood.

In preparation for that great feast, I invite you today to turn to the savior with all the selfishness and all the cowardice and all the jealousy and all the bitterness and all the deceit and all the other sins that burden your conscience and lay them on the shoulders of the sacrificial lamb who carries them to the Cross and leaves them there.

“He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed.”⁵

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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 52:13-53:12 (KJV).

³ St. Matthew 26:1-75 (KJV).

⁴ Isaiah 53:5 (RSV).

⁵ *Id.*