

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYERⁱ

THANKSGIVING DAY

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Priest Associate

Lessons:ⁱⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twelfth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah:ⁱⁱⁱ

“And in that day thou shalt say, O LORD, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation. Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation. And in that day shall ye say, Praise the LORD, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted. Sing unto the LORD; for he hath done excellent things: this is known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fourth Verse of the fourth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Philippians:^{iv}

“ . . . Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”^v

Homily:

Anxiety levels tend to go up around this time of year. Thanksgiving signals the rapid approach of Christmas, and Christmas becomes as much a deadline as a holiday. There are so many details that call for attention and so many tasks to be accomplished.

Students have due dates for term papers and examinations to prepare for. Merchants worry about their inventories – too much? Too little? Or maybe the wrong things? Company executives start to worry about their end-of-year reports. Families make travel plans, worry about weather, and sometimes dread having to deal with nosy aunts who drink too much or big-mouth brothers-in-law who know everything.

Some people worry about paying their bills and heating their homes and buying something for their children, especially if they have been given a lay-off notice. Others are facing a Christmas without a parent or a spouse or other beloved family member who has died.

The culture tells us that at that season we are supposed to be happy, and all the lights and parties and music seem to amplify by contrast, rather than make us forget, the things that make us unhappy.

In today's Second Lesson, St. Paul does not tell us to be happy, but he does tell us not to worry, and he gives us some advice about how to deal with our anxieties. "In everything, by prayer and supplication, let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

Like all wise men, the Apostle realizes that there are some things we can control and some things we can't. There are some things we can do something about and some things we can do nothing about. There are some problems we can solve and some we can't. Jesus himself tells us not to concern ourselves with the things that are beyond our control.

"Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature?"

St. Paul tells us how to handle those things that are beyond our control. Turn them over to God: "In everything, by prayer and supplication, let your requests be known to God." When you have done that, then you are free to turn your attention to the things that you can do something about.

John Wesley used to say, "Let go and let God." That's a hard thing to do, but St. Paul gives a clue about that as well. He says "with thanksgiving".

When we give thanks, we recall things that God has already done for us. He has helped us before. He has strengthened and sustained us before in difficult times. Recalling those times and giving thanks for them helps us to put our faith in God so that we can let go and let God. And the greatest thing for which we give thanks is the gift of a Savior.

The word “thanksgiving” is a translation of the Greek word “eucharistias” [**YEW-carr-ISS-tee-uss**] (it’s actually plural in this passage). *Eucharist* is another word for the Sacrament of Holy Communion. It is the word the gospel writers use when they describe what Jesus did when He blessed the bread and wine at the last supper: “When he had given thanks, ... he gave it to them.”

When we celebrate the Eucharist, we recall what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. We especially hold in remembrance “his blessed passion and precious death, his mighty resurrection ... rendering most hearty thanks for the innumerable benefits procured unto us by the same.” The result of this remembrance and thanksgiving is peace of mind. “The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

And that brings us back to Christmas. Christmas is all about Christ. As long we keep our focus on Him, we can keep everything else in the background where its importance is greatly diminished. We can think about what we need to do and the preparations that we need to make, but we don’t have to worry about them. Our happiness does not depend on them. Our well-being does not depend on them. Our eternal destiny does not depend on them. We have entrusted that to the One who came to earth as a helpless child, lived among us as a teacher and healer, suffered and died as one of us, and rose from the dead to open the way for us live in peace with the Father and with all creation.

It all comes down to faith, which is the opposite of fear. It comes down to trust, which is the opposite of anxiety. It comes down to keeping things in perspective, pushing peripheral things to the periphery and focusing on the one who really “makes the season bright.”

So listen to the Apostle: “Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, let your requests be

known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

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St. David’s Anglican Catholic Church
Charlottesville, Virginia
December 20, 2009

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

ⁱⁱⁱ *Isaiah 12* (KJV).

^{iv} *Philippians 4:4-7* (KJV).

^v *Philippians 4:6-7* (RSV).