

# **SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER<sup>i</sup>**

## **THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY**

**The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Priest Associate**

### **Lessons:<sup>ii</sup>**

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the tenth Verse of the twenty-fourth Chapter of the Fifth Book of Moses, called Deuteronomy.<sup>iii</sup>

“When thou dost lend thy brother any thing, thou shalt not go into his house to fetch his pledge. Thou shalt stand abroad, and the man to whom thou dost lend shall bring out the pledge abroad unto thee. And if the man be poor, thou shalt not sleep with his pledge: In any case thou shalt deliver him the pledge again when the sun goeth down, that he may sleep in his own raiment, and bless thee: and it shall be righteousness unto thee before the LORD thy God.

“Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates: At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the LORD, and it be sin unto thee. The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin.

“Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow’s raiment to pledge: But thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee thence: therefore I command thee to do this thing.

“When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands.

When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt: therefore I command thee to do this thing.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the twenty-third Verse of the tenth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Luke.<sup>iv</sup>

“And he turned him unto his disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

“And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds,

pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed [SHOWD] mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

### **Homily:**

The parable in today’s Second Lesson is about a mugging. Actually, it’s about the reactions of different people who chanced upon the victim of a mugging. It is a story that has been torn out of its cultural context and used as an indictment of the clergy. So before I go any further, I would like to say something in defense of my fellow priests by putting the story back into its cultural context.

In both Leviticus and in Numbers it is written that if a priest has any contact with a dead body, he becomes ritually unclean and unable to perform his duties. The same applies to the Levites who assist the priests in their duties. The victim in the story was left for dead, so the priest and the Levite who saw him lying by the side of the road had to give him a wide berth, especially if they were on their way to the temple in Jerusalem, which is quite likely. So let’s not think badly of the priest and the Levite who passed by on the other side. They were doing what Jewish law required of them.

Let’s also look at the Samaritan in light of the cultural context of the story. He was at the very lowest level of the social structure in Jewish society. Samaria had broken away from Judea in the civil war that followed the death of Solomon. The Samaritans had intermarried with various invading armies and had

built their own temple on a mountain in their own territory. The pure-bred Jews in the South had nothing but scorn for their half brothers in the North. Not only had the Samaritans corrupted the blood lines; they had also corrupted the religion. A group of them had actually sneaked into the temple in Jerusalem, years ago during Passover, and defiled it by scattering around the bones of dead people. So when Jesus was called a Samaritan and was accused of being in league with the devil, it is questionable which was the greater insult.

At the other end of the social hierarchy were the priests. The Jewish priesthood was hereditary, and only those men who were direct descendants of Moses' brother Aaron were eligible for it. Right below the priests were the Levites, who were of the same tribe as Aaron but not directly descended from him. After the Levites came the scribes, the lawyers, the Pharisees, the elders of the synagogues, and all the way down at the bottom were the prostitutes and the tax collectors. The Samaritans ranked even below them.

Now the man who asked the question that prompted Jesus to tell this parable was an expert in Jewish law. He knew perfectly well that what we call "the Summary of the Law" was indeed part of the written law of Israel. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself." But he wanted to know just how far that neighbor business extended. Just who are the people to whom I owe neighborly duties? Is there any one I am allowed to hate?

I have no doubt that when the lawyer asked that question, he had the Samaritans in mind, and maybe the tax collectors also. Jesus would have been very unpopular if He had simply said, "Yes, your neighborly duties extend to the Samaritans and the tax collectors as well." But instead of answering directly, Jesus told

this parable. Then He turned the tables on the man and asked him, “Who do you think was the neighbor of the man who got mugged?”

The lawyer had to admit that the Samaritan in the story was more of a neighbor to the mugging victim than either the priest or the Levite had been. But he didn’t want to come out and say that directly, so instead he said “The one who showed mercy.”

But by putting it that way, the lawyer said something else he didn’t really want to say. Not only did he admit that the duty of neighborliness extends beyond the bloodlines of pure bred Jews, but he also recognized that mercy is more important than law. Inclusiveness and mercy are two of the great themes of Biblical religion and the parable provided an illustration of both.

The inclusive nature of the kingdom of God is laid out in the call of Abraham. He is to be a blessing to all the families of the earth. The Psalms are full of references to the coming of Gentiles to pay homage to Israel and learn the ways of God. The law contains specific provisions that apply to Gentile visitors to Jewish households. The New Testament fully develops this theme.

St. Matthew opens his Gospel with the arrival of wise men from a foreign kingdom to pay homage to the Jewish Messiah. He closes his Gospel with the commissioning of the Apostles to preach and teach and baptize throughout the whole world.

St. Luke, himself a Gentile, is careful to include stories about Roman officers coming to faith in Jesus. St. John has a scene in which Jesus rejoices that Greeks have come to request an audience with Him, and he quotes the words of Jesus that when He is crucified, He will draw all men unto Himself

St. Peter is convinced by a special vision to acknowledge that Gentiles are also God's children and eligible for the blessings of the Kingdom.

St. Paul makes the mission to Gentiles the cornerstone of his ministry and fights for their rights as equal members of the New Israel.

Jesus Himself makes it a point to fraternize with tax collectors and prostitutes and other outcasts of Jewish society. So it is clear that no one is excluded from the blessings of God's people on the basis of their ethnic identity or their station in life.

It is also clear from the reading of Holy Scripture that mercy takes precedence over law.

"I desire mercy and not sacrifice," said the prophet Hosea [**hoe-ZEE-uh**], and he was far from alone. The prophets consistently sounded that note, and the Psalms are full of references and appeals to the mercy of God. The ark of the covenant itself, the holiest object in Israel, the depository of the Ten Commandments, is surmounted by what is called "the mercy seat." Indeed, the mercy of God is the main reason He is worshiped and adored.

All the New Testament writers recognize that admission to the Kingdom of God is through mercy rather than through merit. Jesus, whose mission it is to establish the Kingdom of God on Earth, goes about not only teaching but healing and forgiving sins. He does that because He is the incarnation of the God "whose property is always to have mercy", just as we say in one of our prayers.

There are many prayers in our Prayer Book that sound the notes of inclusivity and mercy. The absolution from Morning

Prayer begins with this phrase: “Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who desireth not the death of a sinner but rather that he may turn from his wickedness and live....”

The absolution for the Communion Service begins thus: “Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, who of his great mercy hath promised forgiveness of sins to all those who with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto him, have mercy upon you....”

Simply by addressing God as “Our Father”, we imply that He loves us and has mercy on us even as He expects and demands our obedience. That’s what fathers do.

But it is the great prayer of consecration that brings together the two themes of inclusiveness and mercy and ties them securely to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, as the Church has always done: “All glory be to thee, Almighty God our Heavenly Father, for that thou, of thy tender mercy, didst give thine only begotten Son Jesus Christ to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption; who made there (by his one oblation once offered) a full perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world....”

By telling the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus draws these two great Biblical themes from the mouth of a man who probably does not believe in either one. He also forces that man to recognize that being a neighbor is not a matter of who you are or where you come from but rather of what you do. The command to love your neighbor is a matter of acting toward others as God has acted toward all of us. Then He says to the man what He also says to all of us: “Go and do thou likewise.”

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St. David’s Anglican Catholic Church

Charlottesville, Virginia  
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<sup>i</sup> “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).

<sup>ii</sup> *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), *THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* xxxiii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

<sup>iii</sup> *Deuteronomy 24:10-end* (KJV).

<sup>iv</sup> *St. Luke 10:23-37* (KJV).