

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

The First Sunday after Trinity

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Priest-in-Charge

Lessons:ⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-third Verse of the twenty-third Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah.ⁱⁱ

“... Am I a God at hand, saith [SETH] the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith [SETH] the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith [SETH] the LORD. I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed. How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? yea, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart; Which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbour, as their fathers have forgotten my name for Baal [BUH-awl]. The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith [SETH] the LORD. Is not my word like as a fire? saith [SETH] the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces? Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith [SETH] the LORD, that steal my words every one from his neighbour. Behold, I am against the prophets, saith [SETH] the LORD, that use their tongues, and say, He saith [SETH]. Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith [SETH] the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith [SETH] the LORD.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the thirteenth Verse of the seventh Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Matthew.ⁱⁱⁱ

“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

“....

“Not every one that saith [SETH] unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “Not everyone that saith [SETH] unto me, ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”^{iv} In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

The New Testament lesson for today is about false prophets. Such people have been a problem ever since religion began. The pagans had them. The Jews had them. The Muslims had them and still do. The Church had them in the time of Jesus Himself, and still has them today. They are called false prophets because they claim to speak on behalf of God, but really speak in behalf of themselves.

You can't tell them by the way they dress. Anybody can dress like a shepherd, or a priest. You can't tell them by what they say. They will tell you whatever it is that they think you want to hear. Once they have gained your trust, they will tell what they want you to do for them. That's when you can begin to recognize them.

How many television evangelists are out there pitching what they call their ministry and living high off the contributions of desperate and gullible people? How many clergy have taken advantage of their office to seduce young women and young boys? How many cults have been founded by Bible-quoting orators who lead their followers into compounds and poison their minds against their own families?

I don't believe that anyone here is likely to be taken in by such people. You are too sophisticated for that. But we are all victims of them nevertheless because they give religion a bad name and make the work of real evangelists and real priests and real prophets difficult.

Jesus assures us in the Gospel that such people will face God's Judgement. But meanwhile, we have to deal with them, and the best way to deal with them, I believe, is simply by our own good works.

“Not everyone that saith **[SETH]** unto me, ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” I don't believe that Jesus is saying that good works will get you into heaven. But He is saying that what people do, and not what people say, is the window into their soul.

God Himself is willing have us see into His character by looking at His works. The creation tells us that He is a God of order. The deliverance of the Jews from Egypt tells us He is a God of compassion who pities the poor and opposes all who would victimize and oppress other people.

But there is something even more important about God that we can perceive by observing what He has done in the person of Jesus. He has shown that He loves us by living among us as one of us. He laid aside all the privileges of deity to do that. No other god has ever exhibited such humility.

In Jesus, God showed His compassion by shedding His human blood as the price of our deliverance from the demands of justice. He showed His willingness to share our pain by suffering pain Himself. He showed His power over death by entering fully into its grasp and then breaking free from it. In all these acts, God distinguished Himself from other deities who do not love us, and who sit in splendid isolation demanding tribute and punishing those who fail to offer it.

In the same way, we can distinguish ourselves from the false prophets and the pseudo religions by doing what we know is right and what reflects the character of the God we proclaim and serve. We can distinguish ourselves as the true children of God by dealing with each other as he has dealt with us.

We come here every week. We say the Creed. We sing the hymns. And the world pays no attention. When we go to work, when we go to school, when do whatever we do the rest of the week, that's when the world pays attention—not to what we say, but to what we do.

So Jesus says, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." What a man says really doesn't tell you much about him. It tells you what he wants you to think about him, but it doesn't tell you what kind of man he really is. In order to learn that, you have to watch what he does.

The world may be fooled for a while by what a man says. But God is never fooled. And so Jesus says, "Not everyone that saith [**SETH**] unto me, 'Lord, Lord' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."

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

ⁱⁱ *Jeremiah 23: 23-32 (KJV).*

ⁱⁱⁱ *St. Matthew 7: 13-14, 21-29 (KJV).*

^{iv} *St. Matthew 7:21 (KJV).*