

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
Passion Sunday¹
(The Fifth Sunday in Lent)

Lessons:

The First Lesson:² Here beginneth the tenth Verse of the first Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.³

“Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith [SETH] the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith [SETH] the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson:⁴ Here beginneth the forty-sixth Verse of the eighth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John.⁵

“Jesus said, Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth God’s

words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God. Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil? Jesus answered, I have not a devil; but I honour my Father, and ye do dishonour me. And I seek not mine own glory: there is one that seeketh and judgeth. Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death. Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death. Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest thou thyself? Jesus answered, If I honour myself, my honour is nothing: it is my Father that honoureth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God: yet ye have not known him; but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you; but I know him, and keep his saying. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: *“Jesus said, Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth God’s words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.”*⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

Sometimes the truth is not pleasant, and cannot be said in pleasant ways. Of course, telling people the truth, if that truth is sufficiently unpleasant, can also get you labeled as a madman. Our Lord clearly came to that point in today’s Gospel, and as He dealt directly with the Pharisees and some of the Jews who did not follow Him just prior to His condemnation, He spoke very plainly and clearly to them about their fate.

Even then, however, some of them could not, or would not, understand Him and how they were condemning themselves. After Jesus stated to them plainly that they were sons, not of God, but of the devil, He directly questioned them: “*Which of you convinceth me of sin?*”⁷ In other words, “Which one of you can prove that I have committed any sin, any error, have proposed any false teaching, or have committed any blasphemy?”

The reality was that none of them could do so, for many had tried already, and more would soon, but no one had been or would be able to prove any error in any thing that Jesus did or taught. And Jesus took His truth to its logical end. “*If I say the truth, why do you not believe me?*”⁸ The only possible answer then, and now, is that they could not convict Him of sin, because He had committed none, and they could not believe Him because they were, as He stated they were, sons of the devil.

Our Lord had stated the truth plainly to them: “*Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.*”⁹ Jesus then granted that they who heard Him were of the lineage of Abraham, but that they had gone completely astray and had utterly abandoned God and all His works. “*I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you. I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father.*”¹⁰

When the crowd answered that Abraham was their father, Jesus derided their claim, noting that if they truly were the spiritual children of Abraham, they would do the works of Abraham. “*But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham.*”¹¹ Nor did Jesus leave them there.

He went further, to point out why they acted as they did: “*Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not.*”¹²

Our Lord had clearly no more time for pretense or gentle words for the children of evil, who even as they spoke, were planning on how to kill Him. But these sad people could not even imagine the reality of Who it was against Whom they were facing off. They assumed that He was just like them, limited to the reality of human existence, trapped in time and place. If they were outraged that Jesus had called them out as liars, they were to be even more upset at His coming claim.

*“Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.”*¹³ This claim utterly scandalized the Jews, because in it, Jesus was clearly stating that He was greater than the revered Abraham, who was regarded as the father of all the Jews. The reaction of the Pharisees and the people was swift: *“Now we know that you have a devil,”* they said. *“Abraham is dead, and the rest of the prophets as well.”* Yet, Jesus had just said that if a man keep His sayings, he would never die.

“Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead,” they asked? Jesus tried once yet again to explain the truth to the crowd, but they would not listen. *“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.”*¹⁴ The implication is clear. Jesus was telling the crowd that He was the very Son of God, and that He has exists outside of time. Abraham was glad to see the time of Christ, because Christ was in the time of Abraham as He was speaking to the crowd, and as He still is today.

The crowd was befuddled. They could not comprehend that this wandering preacher, the son of a carpenter in Galilee, could be God. *“Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?”* And Jesus said to them, *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.”*¹⁵

This was more than the crowd could take, for “I AM” is the Name God had given to Moses when the patriarch demanded to know with whom he was conversing.¹⁶ Thus for Jesus to say, in effect, “I am ‘I AM’” was, to the Scripturally instructed, for Him to announce His own parity with God the Father, that is, to proclaim His divinity.

His hearers had been told they were sons of the devil, their evil had been pointed out to them and exposed. The reality of Who it was they were opposing had been proven before their very faces. But convinced that they were dealing with a madman, they took up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the Temple.

The battle lines were drawn, and had hardened. The final battle was about to begin. Just as during this confrontation at the Temple, Jesus' enemies would be unable to defeat Him. The final victory is His.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, as we near the commemoration of thy final battle with evil and sin, let us chose to stand by thy side. Let us remain assured that there is no sin, no error and no fault in thy teachings, and so remain faithful always to thy word and doctrine. Let us be thy faithful servants in the coming battle and always. For the sake of thy Name we pray. *Amen.*

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The Rev'd Larry Wagoner, MSW¹⁷
March 17, 2013

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Fifth Sunday in Lent, commonly called Passion Sunday, 2013.

² *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xx (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ Isaiah 1:10-20 (KJV).

⁴ "Upon any Sunday or Holy Day, the Minister may read the Epistle or the Gospel of the Day in place of the Second Lesson at Morning or Evening Prayer." *Concerning the Service of the Church*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁵ St. John 46-59a (KJV).

⁶ St. John 8:46-47 (KJV).

⁷ St. John 8:46 (KJV).

⁸ St. John 8:46 (KJV).

⁹ St. John 8:34 (KJV).

¹⁰ St. John 8:37-38 (KJV).

¹¹ St. John 8:40 (KJV).

¹² St. John 8:44-45 (KJV).

¹³ St. John 8:51 (KJV).

¹⁴ St. John 8:56 (KJV).

¹⁵ St. John 8:58 (KJV).

¹⁶ Exodus 3:14 (KJV).

¹⁷ Supply Priest, Holy Angels Anglican Catholic Mission, Picayune, MS, and Christ Church Anglican Catholic Pro-Cathedral Church, Metairie, LA.