

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

Sexagesima Sunday¹

Lessons:

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

“... The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.

“The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.

“For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord GOD will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up.

“Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson:⁴ Here beginneth the fourth Verse of the eighth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke.⁵

“When much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable: A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way-side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare

fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be? And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand. Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way-side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

It is often said that a picture is worth a thousand words, and that is true whether the picture is a photograph, a painting, or a clear description in words that everyone understands. A clear image like that cuts through the layers of definition, understanding and varying impressions, allowing a direct communication between the one who offers the image and the one who receives it, and allowing the recipient of the image to draw his or her own conclusions about what the image means.

Our Lord understood this and used to great effect His ability to describe things in terms His listeners would easily understand. One example is His use of the parable to explain things to those who came to hear Him. This ability to make the ways of God understandable to the people was one reason crowds were drawn to Him wherever He went.

In today's Gospel, we hear one example of this ability in action. Jesus was travelling in the area of the Sea of Galilee, and had been preaching in all the nearby cities. The people who had heard Him speak, or who had heard from others about Him, thronged to hear Him again, perhaps hoping to see Him, perhaps hoping to see Him perform some miracle. On this occasion, His hearers got to hear Him explain how the Word of God affects those who hear it.

Jesus, however, did not speak in the dry, legalistic, theological phrases of the Pharisees, but instead in colorful, vibrant terms, drawing examples from the world around Him. These were words and examples that His listeners were sure to understand and to which they could relate. These were rural people, living in a word in which farming, raising animals and dealing with nature were well known to everyone. Jesus spoke to them in words, phrases and images which were drawn from their own lives.

And so while theologians might speak in awed tones about marginal response levels to varying levels of devotion to instruction, our Lord talked to people in terms they understood. People's eyes will glaze if you talk to them about the varying effectiveness of specific lessons, and how effectiveness varies depending on preparatory conditions, but farmers understand at a basic, "gut" level that seed will grow differently depending on where it lands and depending on what care is given it.

Our Lord talked to the people not only in terms they understood, but about things they understood. Further, He actually talked to them to help them, to instruct them and to better their lives. The Pharisees, on the other hand, only spoke down to people, treating everyone else as lesser beings who were only marginally able to understand the mysteries

of God, if at all. The Pharisees spent their time trying to make themselves look good.

Little wonder that the people flocked out to see and hear Jesus speak and do signs. This was a teacher, a prophet, a leader whom they could understand and to whom they could relate--and who did not despise them.

*“When much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable:”*⁷ As Jesus finished telling this parable, He concluded by telling His hearers to pay attention to His words and apply them to their lives: *“He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”*⁸ In other words, our Lord told His hearers, take heed to understand me; these words are important. If you understand them, then you should apply them to your life.

The disciples, who might have been expected best to understand His words, as so often occurred, did not understand. They asked Jesus to explain His words, asking, *“What might this parable be?”*⁹ Jesus explained to them, *“Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.”*¹⁰

The disciples were privileged to have Jesus with them to explain His words, and the Kingdom. Others, however, would be left with only His words, and so he spoke to them in stories and words they would understand and be able to use.

We live today in a technological world, in which we communicate with each other over cell phones, text messages and email. We are familiar with television and radio, and we know from personal experience that the carefully rehearsed, timed and choreographed message has become the communication s of choice for politicians and teachers. Yet even today, the simple parable still touches our inner sense of what is right and leaves us clear as to our Lord’s message and intent.

Let us not be the seeds which fall by the way side, nor those that fell upon the rocks. In the midst even of troubles, let us also not be that seed which is choked down by thorns. Let us instead be that seed which is planted in good ground, and which brings forth good fruit.

Let us pray.

Merciful God, grant that we at all times hear Thy word and be fed by it, that we, like the seed in our Lord's parable, find good ground in which to grow and produce good fruit. Keep us, Lord, from temptation, from the choking concerns of the world and from the evil of the devil. This we ask through the intercession of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

—oo0oo—

The Rev'd Larry Wagoner, MSW¹¹
February 3, 2013

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on Sexagesima Sunday, 2013.

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

³ Isaiah 50:4-10 (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. Luke 8:4-15 (KJV).

⁶ St. Luke 8:10 (KJV).

⁷ St. Luke 8:4 (KJV).

⁸ St. Luke 8:8 (KJV).

⁹ St. Luke 8:9 (KJV).

¹⁰ St. Luke 8:10 (KJV).

¹¹ Supply Priest, Holy Angels Anglican Mission, Picayune, MS, and Christ Church Anglican Catholic Pro-Cathedral Church, Metairie, LA.