

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹

The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity²

Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-first Verse of the second Chapter of Joel.⁴

“Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things. Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig tree and the vine do yield their strength. Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you. And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed. And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-fourth Verse of the sixth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Matthew.⁵

“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little

faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Gospel: *“Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than the food, and the body than the raiment?”*⁶ In the Na~~x~~me of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

Let me start out by telling you that I think my wife has a deeper and stronger grip on today’s message than I do—but I will get back to that later.

We are a people profoundly affected by stress and anxiety. One recent study found that almost three-quarters of Americans report that they are affected by stress in their daily lives.⁷ Stress has always been with us, of course, even in the time of Jesus.

Psychologists and those who study the affects of stress on people even differentiate between the effects on people of “good stress” and “bad stress”. So-called “good stress” causes “eustress”, according to Dr. Jeffery Mitchell, who developed the “Mitchell Model” of Critical Incident Stress Debriefings. This good stress is unlike negative stress in that instead of causing ill effects in people, it motivates them to meet deadlines, make necessary changes, and to keep achieving in life.

Negative stress, however, causes “distress”. It is responsible for many health concerns, mental health issues, and for destructive influences on many peoples’

lives. These can include physical, emotional and behavioral effects that can be destructive in every aspect of our lives.

Jesus cautioned His followers against spending too much time and energy worrying about earthly things and causing themselves distress in the process: *“For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Be not therefore anxious for the morrow: for the morrow will be anxious for itself.”*⁸

God understands your needs and He will not leave you in need. He loves His children, and is always concerned about their well-being. But our first calling, our first concern, should always be seeking His kingdom, said Jesus. Take care of your first concern, and God will take care of the rest.

To reassure His listeners, Jesus pointed out the care God takes of His creation: *“Behold the birds of the heaven, that they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them,”* Jesus notes. *“Are not ye of much more value than they?”*⁹

“And why are ye anxious concerning raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” Jesus said, *“But if God doth so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?”*¹⁰

Jesus goes on to note that no matter what we do, we cannot affect the results in any case: *“And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit unto the measure of his life?”*¹¹

As for tomorrow, don’t worry excessively about that, for the time will come to deal with tomorrow. Take care of today first. There will be enough to worry about tomorrow when tomorrow gets here: *“Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”*¹²

It comes down to what is the most important thing to you. If issues of clothing, of appearance, of possessions, are the most important thing in your life, then you are worshiping and serving money by spending all your time and effort in gathering earthly riches. *“Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”*¹³

The reason for this, Jesus says, is where your devotion lies. “*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other.*”¹⁴ No matter how much we might pretend, or even try, the pursuit of God and the pursuit of Mammon are so diametrically opposed that they cannot co-exist. We must choose to follow one or the other.

Now, as to why my wife understands this passage from the Gospel better than I do. It transpires from time to time that she and I are going out to eat. When we are doing that, the question of where we are to go naturally comes up. The conversation is always the same:

I: “Where do you want to go?”

She: “I don’t know, where do you want to go?”

I: “But what would you like?”

She: “I don’t care, whatever you like.”

Our Lord said, “*Therefore I say unto you, Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink.*”¹⁵ Clearly, she understands this at her very core.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, let us never be anxious about those things which truly do not matter, focusing instead on seeking Your kingdom. Let us always remain fixed on following Your ways, Your will and Your Gospel. Give us the wisdom to recognize the pursuit of mammon for what it is and to reject it and all other false pursuits. This we ask in Jesus’ Holy Name. Amen.

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The Rev. Larry Wagoner, MSW¹⁶
September 8, 2013

¹ “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).

² This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity, 2013.

³ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁴ Joel 2:21-27 (KJV).

⁵ St. Matthew 6:24-end (KJV).

⁶ St. Matthew 6:24-25 (KJV).

⁷ Stress In America: Key Findings. The American Psychological Association, 2010.

⁸ St. Matthew 6:32-34 (KJV).

⁹ St. Matthew 6:26 (KJV).

¹⁰ St. Matthew 6:28-30 (KJV).

¹¹ St. Matthew 6:27 (KJV).

¹² St. Matthew 6:34 (KJV).

¹³ St. Matthew 6:24 (KJV).

¹⁴ St. Matthew 6:24 (KJV).

¹⁵ St. Matthew 6:25 (KJV).

¹⁶ Supply Priest, Holy Angels Anglican Catholic Mission, Picayune, MS, and Christ Anglican Catholic Pro-Cathedral Church, Metairie, LA.