

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹

The Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity²

Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fifth Chapter of the Fifth Book of Moses, called Deuteronomy.⁴

“And Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them. The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb [**HOAREBB**]. The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day. The LORD talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire, (I stood between the LORD and you at that time, to shew [**SHOW**] you the work of the LORD: for ye were afraid by reason of the fire, and went not up into the mount;) saying,

“I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt have none other gods before me. Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, And shewing [**SHOWING**] mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments. Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain: for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee. Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou. And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day.

“Honour thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. Thou shalt not kill. Neither shalt thou commit adultery. Neither shalt thou steal. Neither shalt thou bear false witness against thy neighbour. Neither shalt thou desire thy neighbour's wife, neither shalt thou

covet thy neighbour's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or any thing that is thy neighbour's."

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the thirty-fourth Verse of the twenty-second Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.⁵

"But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

"While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David. He saith [SETH] unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: *"While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions."*⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

“What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?” In other words, Who do you say that I am? This is the essence of Jesus’ question to the Pharisees and it is a question He faced frequently during His ministry on Earth. It is at the heart of our Christian life even today.

The Pharisees had been questioning Jesus, attempting to trap Him into some misstatement or false claim for which they could attack and condemn Him. Finally, our Lord turned the proverbial tables on them and asked the Pharisees a question: “*What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?*”

The question trapped the Pharisees into a logical corner from which they could not escape and thus silenced those who would ask Him questions designed only to entrap Him. The question is an easy one for any Christian to answer, of course. Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary, and of the House and lineage of David. This is part of the very core, the essence, of what we as Christians know to be true.

For the Pharisees, however, things were not so simple. They believed that the Messiah would be a man who would come to establish an Earthly kingdom and free Israel from the tyrannical rule of Rome and the other foreign powers which had conquered Israel. The very notion of the Messiah’s being God was utterly foreign to them.

Thus, Christ’s question posed an insurmountable stumbling block for the Pharisees and so reduced them to silence. They could not answer the question honestly, for to do so would deny what they believed and would be to admit that they were opposing God. Admitting to that reality was, for them, not tenable.

Jesus poses this devastating question in an interesting manner. If Christ, the Lord and Savior, is David’s son, then how could David call Him Lord? The only answer which makes any sense is that the Christ is both fully man, being the son and lineage of David, and at the same time fully God.

That David referred to the Messiah as Lord was clear: “*The LORD says to my lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool.’*”⁷ This authority to rule, to sit at the right hand of God, could only be given to the Son of God. This was the fact that the Pharisees were loath to admit.

It was their inability to come up with any response to their position that silenced them. The question really came down to this: “Who do you say that I am?”

If the Pharisees claimed that Jesus was only a man, then they could not explain all that He had done: the miracles, the healings, the teachings beyond their own wisdom. Yet these had been witnessed by people throughout Israel. Yet Jesus was clearly of the royal lineage of David.

“*Who do you say that I am?*” In Matthew 16:15, Jesus had asked the same question of His disciples. Their answer was: “*Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.*”⁸

But Jesus continued to press for an answer: “*But who do you say that I am?*” Peter voiced the truth: “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*”⁹ Jesus answered him, “*Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.*” In a blinding moment of clarity for the oft-confused Peter, he had come to the right conclusion: Jesus was the Christ, the anointed Messiah, the Son of God.

Jesus tells Peter that he has come to understand this reality not by human means but by the direct intervention of God. St. Paul later says the same thing: that no one can come to the knowledge and understanding that Jesus is the Son of God except through the working of the Holy Spirit. “... [N]o one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰

And so we are left again with the very same question. “*Who do you say that I am?*”

If we say—as many in the non-believing world try to say—that Jesus was only some right-minded fellow with an admirable philosophy and a winning way with people, then we reject the rest of the Scripture.

If we reject the divinity of Christ, then we reject everything that He stood for as well, and we are left with nothing more than empty shells of lives, bereft of the possibility of eternal life, of salvation, of forgiveness. If we adopt that futile and forlorn way of thinking, then at the end of life we must find that life was without point, and death is the final, absolute end of everything.

If, however, we with David, and the Apostles, and with so many through the years, conclude that Jesus is in fact the Son of God, eternally-begotten of His Father, our Lord and Savior who offers us the chance of redemption and salvation, then we know that our lives hold great promise and meaning, that what we say, and do, and think, does in fact make a difference.

We know beyond any doubt that regardless of the troubles we face, the trials we must overcome, the difficulties of life, there is eternal life waiting for us through the grace and mercy of God and the salvation made possible by His Son. We are buoyed by the sure knowledge of the precious love and saving grace of God. We are uplifted by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Along with St. Peter, we are able to answer with confidence, with boldness and faith the question: *“Who do you say that I am?”* With Peter, we are able to answer: *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. You are Lord, Savior and King. You are our Messiah.”*

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, in a world so caught up in confusion, conflict, division, discord and pain, keep us always mindful of Your saving Grace and Love. Remind us always of the answer to the question You posed so long ago, Who do you say that I am? Be with us through difficulty and trial and, in Your time, bring us safely to the safety, peace and joy of Your eternal kingdom. This we pray in Your Most Holy Name. Amen.

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The Rev. Mr. Larry Wagoner, MSW¹¹
Sunday, October 7, 2012

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 Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity, 2012.*

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

⁴ *Deuteronomy 5:1-21 (KJV).*

⁵ *St. Matthew 22:34-end (KJV).*

⁶ *St. Matthew 22:41-46 (RSV).*

⁷ *Psalms 110:1 (RSV).*

⁸ *St. Matthew 16:14 (RSV).*

⁹ *St. Matthew 16:16 (RSV).*

¹⁰ *I Corinthians 12:3 (RSV).*

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