

**SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY**

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the seventh Chapter of Amos.²

“Thus hath the Lord GOD shewed [**SHOWD**] unto me; and, behold, he formed grasshoppers in the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth; and, lo, it was the latter growth after the king’s mowings. And it came to pass, that when they had made an end of eating the grass of the land, then I said, O Lord GOD, forgive, I beseech thee: by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small. The LORD repented for this: It shall not be, saith [**SETH**] the LORD.

“Thus hath the Lord GOD shewed [**SHOWD**] unto me: and, behold, the Lord GOD called to contend by fire, and it devoured the great deep, and did eat up a part. Then said I, O Lord GOD, cease, I beseech thee: by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small. The LORD repented for this: This also shall not be, saith the Lord GOD.

“Thus he shewed [**SHOWD**] me: and, behold, the LORD stood upon a wall made by a plumbline, with a plumbline in his hand. And the LORD said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumbline. Then said the LORD, Behold, I will set a plumbline in the midst of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more: And the high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.

“Then Amaziah [**amm-uh-ZYE-uh**] the priest of Bethel [**BETH-ull**] sent to Jeroboam [**dgerr-oh-BOH-umm**] king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos saith [**SETH**], Jeroboam [**dgerr-oh-BOH-umm**] shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of their own land. Also Amaziah [**amm-uh-ZYE-uh**] said unto Amos, O thou seer,

go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: But prophesy not again any more at Bethel [**BETH-ull**]: for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court.

“Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah [**amm-uh-ZYE-uh**], I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycomore [**SICK-uh-morr**] fruit: And the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel.

“Now therefore hear thou the word of the LORD: Thou sayest, Prophesy not against Israel, and drop not thy word against the house of Isaac. Therefore thus saith [**SETH**] the LORD; Thy wife shall be an harlot in the city, and thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou shalt die in a polluted land: and Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fourth Chapter of the General Epistle of James.³

“From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Do ye think that the scripture saith [**SETH**] in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith [**SETH**], God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he

That way, if, as C. S. Lewis suggested He may, God says to us, ““All right, then, have it your way””, our way will be the same as His way so we will remain in His company.

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The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister¹⁹
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¹ *An Alternative Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised in 1928)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, WITH THE ADDITIONS AND DEVIATIONS PROPOSED IN 1928 33 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxv (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxiii (CIPBC 1963).

² Amos 7:1-17 (KJV).

³ James 4:1-17 (KJV).

⁴ James 4:7-8a (RSV).

⁵ Romans 7:15, 18b-19, 21-23 (RSV).

⁶ James 4:1a (RSV).

⁷ James 4:2 (RSV).

⁸ Genesis 3.

⁹ Article XV “Of Christ alone without Sin”, *The Articles of Religion*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 605 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943), quoting 1 John 1:8.

¹⁰ Article IX “Of Original or Birth-Sin”, *The Articles of Religion*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 604 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

¹¹ St. Luke 13:27 (RSV).

¹² St. Matthew 7:23 and 25:41.

¹³ Hebrews 12:14 (RSV).

¹⁴ Article XI “Of the Justification of Man”, *The Articles of Religion*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 605 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

¹⁵ 1 John 2:1-2 (RSV).

¹⁶ 2 Corinthians 7:9-10 (RSV).

¹⁷ James 4:7-8a (RSV).

¹⁸ St. Luke 13:27 (RSV).

¹⁹ Priest Assistant, Christ Anglican Catholic Church, Metairie LA; Honorary Canon, the Diocese of the Resurrection; Honorary Canon and Canon to the Ordinary, The Diocese of New Orleans, The Anglican Catholic Church.

3. The remedy for sin is for us to repent, to resolve to amend our ways, and then to accept Christ's free gift of the Grace that will strengthen us to resist our otherwise irresistible impulse to evil.

Our own unaided efforts will always be too weak to overcome our inborn propensity to offend God. It is for this reason that the Articles of Religion tell us, "We are counted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings."¹⁴

Or, as St. John puts it in the "Comfortable Words" we hear during each celebration of the Eucharist: "[I]f any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."¹⁵

But for Christ to be able to apply to us His merits, so that, unworthy though we be, we may be accounted righteous before the Father, we must first repent us of our evil ways and form a real purpose of amending them. This is what St. Paul told the Corinthians: "I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting; for you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief brings death."¹⁶

Conclusion:

So remember what St. James wrote to his readers: "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."¹⁷ Those who draw near to God will never hear Our Lord say to them, as He said to those others, "I tell you, I do not know where you come from; depart from me, all you workers of iniquity!"¹⁸

will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another? Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."⁴ In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction:

St. Paul once described to the Romans the dilemma of sin in these words: "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ... I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. ... So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil

lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members.”⁵

Theme:

Although St. James does not use the technical term “original sin”, that is the subject of his fourth Chapter, which forms this morning’s Second Lesson. When he tells us that our passions are at war in our members,⁶ and that we desire to do and to have, and so kill, or that we covet but cannot obtain so we fight and wage war,⁷ he is referring to those same impulses about which St. Paul told us in the passage from Romans which I just quoted to you.

Development:

- 1. It is a fact of human nature that we have an in-born propensity to disobey God and to act in ways that offend Him.**

The whole point of the account in Genesis of the Fall of Adam⁸ is that the ancient Hebrews knew from their own experiences, and further could observe and all around them, that human beings act in ways that are selfish, oppressive, destructive, and self-defeating. Clearly a good God does not condone such behavior, so how is it to be explained?

They are not the only ones to have made these same observations. C. S. Lewis is said to have remarked that original sin is the only dogma of Christianity that can be empirically verified, for all we need to do to prove its existence is to look around us at how people actually behave.

This is what the fifteenth Article of Religion means when it quotes St. John and says, “if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”⁹ And as the

ninth Article reminds us, “Original sin ... is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man ... whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil...”¹⁰

- 2. Sin separates us from God, not immediately, but in eternity, where it counts.**

St. Luke records one of Our Lord’s teachings on the day of Judgement, in which He used the metaphor of an householder. He depicts the householder’s rising and shutting the door of his house, leaving inside some who have already managed to enter and leaving outside others who did not yet make it through the entrance. Then those who did not gain entry knock on the door, asking him to open it and reminding him that they had seen him and carried on their daily lives in his presence while he was trying to teach them.

It is implied that they were not attending to that teaching, for he replies, “I tell you, I do not know where you come from; depart from me, all you workers of iniquity!”¹¹ And the message could not be clearer: those who were in the Lord’s presence here on earth, but who did not reform their ways to conform to His teaching, will ultimately be excluded from His presence. And St. Matthew records two other occasions when Jesus made almost precisely the same statement.¹²

As if these instances by themselves were not enough, St. Paul reminds us of “the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.”¹³ This is one of those truths that cannot be stated better than the way C. S. Lewis put it when he wrote, “There are two kinds of people: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, ‘All right, then, have it your way.’”