

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER
The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fourth Verse of the third Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel.³

“And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them. For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of an hard language, but to the house of Israel; Not to many people of a strange speech and of an hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee. But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted. Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house. Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears. And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith [SETH] the Lord GOD; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear. Then the spirit took me up, and I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of the LORD from his place. I heard also the noise of the wings of the living creatures that touched one another, and the noise of the wheels over against them, and a noise of a great rushing. So the spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the LORD was strong upon me.

“Then I came to them of the captivity at Telabib [tell-AY-bibb], that dwelt by the river of Chebar [KEY-barr], and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days. And it came to pass at the end of seven days, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear

³ Ezekiel 3:4-21 (KJV).
⁴ Ezekiel 13:1-16 (KJV).
⁵ I John 3:1-end (KJV).
⁶ I John 4:19 (KJV).
⁷ Romans 5:5-8 (KJV).
⁸ I John 4:11-13 (KJV).
⁹ Galatians 2:20 (KJV).
¹⁰ I John 4:19-21 (KJV).
¹¹ I John 3:15-18 (KJV).
¹² St. Luke 14:16-24 (KJV).
¹³ Psalm 34:8 (KJV).

the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumbling-block before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul.”

Or,

Here beginneth the thirteenth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel.⁴

“And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy, and say thou unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts, Hear ye the word of the LORD; Thus saith [SETH] the Lord GOD; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! ⁴O Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts. Ye have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the LORD. They have seen vanity and lying divination, saying, The LORD saith [SETH]: and the LORD hath not sent them: and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word. Have ye not seen a vain vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination, whereas ye say, The LORD saith [SETH] it; albeit I have not spoken? Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because ye have spoken vanity, and seen lies, therefore, behold, I am against you, saith the Lord GOD.

our attention to the Blessed Sacrament. One very real part of our duty to our neighbor, born of the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, is to invite people to come in. That invitation is to “taste and see that the LORD is good”.¹³ This presupposes that we help them to true faith in Jesus Christ so that they may be full members of His Church.

Contrary to the way some modern Evangelicals think, evangelism is not finished when someone “accepts Jesus.” A person needs to be baptized, filled with the Holy Spirit, and to taste of the Master’s Supper, the Blessed Sacrament of His Body and Blood. Evangelism, properly understood, requires the ministry of God’s word and sacraments.

Nonetheless, one ministry everybody has is contained in those words we heard: “*Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.*” The Holy Spirit who dwells within you gives gifts that enable and empower each of you, in ways so varied that no one could know them, to be a witness that Jesus Christ is Lord, and the Savior of the world. Love has to be your motivation for helping others come to know Him.

“And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”

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The Rev’d Robert Hart
June 17, 2012

¹ This sermon was originally written on the propers for Holy Communion on the Second Sunday after Trinity, 2012.

² *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 43 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxix (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxvii (CIPBC 1963).

The first generation of Christians faced rejection from many of their fellow Jews, and at the same time they came to see that the Gospel is for all nations, and so began including Gentiles in the Church as God had foretold and as Christ commanded. This began when St. Peter went to the house of Cornelius, and then, in time, it became the ministry of St. Paul more than any other, to take the Gospel to people who had formerly been thought of as unclean, so much so that no Jew could enter their houses. This tells us that taking the Gospel to those who are outside the pale is a great act of love in itself.

This is from St. Luke's account of Our Lord's parable of the rich man's great feast:¹²

“Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.”

Evangelism is a duty, an act of charity that we owe our neighbor; it is a manifestation of love. If we are to evangelize seriously, love for neighbor must be our motivation rather than simply a need to grow our churches. Yes, the Master wants them to come into His house. But this is not to fill pews, collect more money, or keep up with the churches that boast of more members.

The Master wants His house to be filled, and the emphasis is on the feast. The emphasis on the feast speaks of the “Marriage Supper of the Lamb,” a reference to eternal joy for those who are raised to immortality on the Last Day. Nonetheless, the use of a feast in the parable should also draw

And mine hand shall be upon the prophets that see vanity, and that divine lies: they shall not be in the assembly of my people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel; and ye shall know that I am the Lord GOD.

“Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar: Say unto them which daub it with untempered mortar, that it shall fall: there shall be an overflowing shower; and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall rend it. Lo, when the wall is fallen, shall it not be said unto you, Where is the daubing wherewith ye have daubed it? Therefore thus saith **[SETH]** the Lord GOD; I will even rend it with a stormy wind in my fury; and there shall be an overflowing shower in mine anger, and great hailstones in my fury to consume it. So will I break down the wall that ye have daubed with untempered mortar, and bring it down to the ground, so that the foundation thereof shall be discovered, and it shall fall, and ye shall be consumed in the midst thereof: and ye shall know that I am the LORD. Thus will I accomplish my wrath upon the wall, and upon them that have daubed it with untempered mortar, and will say unto you, The wall is no more, neither they that daubed it; To wit, the prophets of Israel which prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and which see visions of peace for her, and there is no peace, saith **[SETH]** the Lord GOD.

“Likewise, thou son of man, set thy face against the daughters of thy people, which prophesy out of their own heart; and prophesy thou against them, And say, Thus saith **[SETH]** the Lord GOD; Woe to the women that sew pillows to all armholes, and make kerchiefs upon the head of every stature to hunt souls! Will ye hunt the souls of my people, and will ye save the souls alive that come unto you? And will ye pollute me among my people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, to slay the souls that should not die, and to save the souls alive that should not live, by your lying to my people that hear your lies? Wherefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against your pillows, wherewith ye there hunt the souls to make

them fly, and I will tear them from your arms, and will let the souls go, even the souls that ye hunt to make them fly. Your kerchiefs also will I tear, and deliver my people out of your hand, and they shall be no more in your hand to be hunted; and ye shall know that I am the LORD. Because with lies ye have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life: Therefore ye shall see no more vanity, nor divine divinations: for I will deliver my people out of your hand: and ye shall know that I am the LORD.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the third Chapter of the First Epistle General of John.⁵

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is the message that ye heard from the

because you know that the Son of God loved *you*, and gave himself for *you*.

That produces love for God, and produces love for your neighbor. In Trintiytide, we see that we cannot love God if we do not love our neighbor:

*“We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he bath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.”*¹⁰

And so, from today’s Second Lesson:

*“Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.”*¹¹

This is practical, and speaks of love that acts spontaneously, because it is a reality always present. Though St. John’s words make us think of practical, earthly necessities (and the Church has always emphasized ministry to the poor concerning their practical needs, including medical needs), we must remember that John expressed his love most clearly by preaching the Gospel, and writing to the end that we would believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

scourged, mocked, in purple robe arrayed.
He bore the shameful cross and death,
for us gave up his dying breath.
For us he rose from death again;
for us he went on high to reign;
for us he sent his Spirit here
to guide, to comfort and to cheer.
All glory to our Lord and God
for love so deep, so high, so broad;
the Trinity whom we adore
forever and forevermore!”

(Text: Thomas á Kempis; trans. Benj. Webb, J.M. Neale, alt.)

This corresponds to the First and Great Commandment because we cannot manufacture love for God. If not for what Jesus did on this earth, and if not for the Holy Spirit’s coming down to the Church on the day of Pentecost, we could not love God. His love for us is emphasized in the first half of our year, and this does not merely require our love for God; it produces it. *“We love him, because he first loved us.”*

Now, after Pentecost, we are back in Trinitytide and the emphasis is on the second table of the Law, as we see in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, and as we heard in today’s Second Lesson: *“Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.”*⁸

Our love for neighbor also comes from the same love of God manifested in Jesus Christ, manifested most visibly on the Cross where He died for each of us—love you must learn to take personally, as St. Paul took it personally, saying with him *“... the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”*⁹ Your charity, grown as the virtue of perfection in your heart by the Holy Spirit, is love that begins to take root and grow only

beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous. Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

Now that we are settled into the long green season of Trinitytide, we have entered into the second half of the Church year. In the Epistles and Gospels for the first two Sundays after Trinity, we find a theme of duty to our neighbor; today, near the end of Trinitytide, we return to that theme. It is as if the Church year divides like the two tables of the Law. The first four Commandments are about our duty to God, corresponding to

the First and Great Commandment: *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.”* All these: Thou shalt have none other gods but me, Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain, Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath-day, are the first table.

The second table of the Law, all the rest of the Commandments, are about our duty to our neighbor, and they correspond to the Second Great Commandment, *“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”* Honour thy father and thy mother, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor, Thou shalt not covet, are Commandments briefly summed up by love of neighbor. If you were prepared for Confirmation according to the requirements laid out in the Book of Common Prayer with its Offices of Instruction, you know these things.

When I say that the Church year reflects these two tables of the Law, I draw from the First Epistle of St. John, which is read on the first two Sundays after Trinity and then again today. On that first Sunday of this season, we read as the Epistle at the Eucharist, from the chapter that follows today’s Second Lesson: *“We love him, because he first loved us.”*⁶ That is what the first half of the Church year teaches us in detail. We begin by looking ahead, focusing on the day when Christ will come again in glory. On the first Sunday of the Church year, we see that His coming will be like a refiner’s fire, seeing His cleansing of the Temple with a view to the last day and His coming to judge the quick and the dead.

Then, soon after that new beginning, we are told the story of God’s great love on Christmas, when the babe, the world’s redeemer, first revealed His sacred face. We are then reminded all throughout Epiphany that He went about doing good, healing all who were oppressed of the devil. In Lent we

enter with Him into His fasting and discipline, and prepare to follow Him to Gethsemane, and then to His trial and death.

At that point we see the greatest manifestation of God’s love:

*“And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”*⁷

St. Paul tells us the same thing that St. John tells us, and also reminds us that the Holy Spirit makes this a reality in our own hearts. Our love for God is only possible because He first loved us, and gave His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

The first half of the church year draws most of our attention to what God has done for us in His Son, Jesus Christ. It is summarized by a hymn:

“O Love, how deep, how broad, how high,
how passing thought and fantasy,
that God, the Son of God should take
our mortal form for mortals’ sake.
For us baptized, for us he bore
his holy fast and hungered sore.
For us temptations sharp he knew,
for us the tempter overthrew.
For us he prayed, for us he taught,
for us his daily works he wrought,
by words and signs and actions thus,
still seeking not himself but us.
For us to evil men betrayed,