
SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER
The Sunday next before Advent¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the second Chapter of Haggai³ [**HAGG-eye**].

“In the seventh month, in the one and twentieth day of the month, came the word of the LORD by the prophet Haggai, saying, Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and to the residue of the people, saying, Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing? Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith [**SETH**] the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith [**SETH**] the LORD, and work: for I am with you, saith [**SETH**] the LORD of hosts: According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. For thus saith [**SETH**] the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith [**SETH**] the LORD of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith [**SETH**] the LORD of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith [**SETH**] the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith [**SETH**] the LORD of hosts.”

Or,

Here beginneth the third Chapter of Malachi.⁴

“Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to this temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom

⁷ I Corinthians 15:1 *ff.*

⁸ Isaiah 53:10 (KJV).

⁹ Romans 4:22-25 (KJV).

¹⁰ Ephesians 1:3-6 (KJV).

¹¹ St. Mark 10:32-34 (KJV).

¹² St. John 3:17 (KJV).

¹³ Rector, St. Benedict’s Anglican Catholic Church, Chapel Hill, NC.

ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith [SETH] the LORD of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years. And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith [SETH] the LORD of hosts. For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

“Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?

“Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith [SETH] the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith [SETH] the LORD of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith [SETH] the LORD of hosts.

“Your words have been stout against me, saith [SETH] the LORD. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee? Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts? And now we call the

heart, or, sincere. Repentance must be sincere; not necessarily emotional (though that can be a very good sign), but always sincere. And “true faith” may be as small as a grain of mustard seed, for even that little is enough. More largely, the Good News is that the risen Christ has commissioned the Church of His Apostles to be His instrument of forgiveness, not of condemnation.

In all of history, no line has been more important than this: “*Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.*” His resurrection was a fact they could see, hear and touch. To this fact they have borne witness by preaching the Gospel, their own eyewitness testimony courageously declared, unrelentingly declared even to the shedding of their blood as His faithful martyrs. For, above all else, the message of His Resurrection from the dead on the third day is the message of God's love, that His Son came into the world to bring salvation, peace and reconciliation with God.

This is the message Christ has commissioned to be proclaimed by His Apostolic Church. Therefore, we too must believe He has risen, and be glad.

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The Rev'd Robert Hart¹³
April 15, 2012

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Mass on the First Sunday after Easter, 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 45 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xli (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xl (CIPBC 1963).

³ Haggai 2:1-9 (KJV).

⁴ Malachi 3:1—4:end (KJV).

⁵ St. John 20:1-end (KJV).

⁶ St. John 20:20b (KJV).

“Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. Now it was time for the Lord to send them out: Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.”

This means that the Apostles were, and therefore the Apostolic Church is, in the world as the Body of Christ, the extension of His Incarnation. It means the Apostolic Church, including you and me, is here to assist and work with God in the service and ministry of reconciliation, calling all men everywhere to repent, filling the world with the Good News that Jesus Christ has taken away sin and conquered death. It means the Apostolic Church, of which you are a part, is to go into the highways and hedges and compel people to come in that His house may be filled. It means that you are here on a mission of peace, to help your neighbor obtain peace with God through Jesus Christ.

“And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith [SETH] unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.”

This too speaks of the Church as the Body of Christ. Of course, it speaks directly of a Sacrament that belongs to the Apostolic ministry of Christ’s own priesthood though ordained men. And I have challenged those who reject our belief in the Sacrament of Absolution, in these words: “If your church has no one in it who believes that he has the authority to forgive sins, how can you say that you are in the same Church founded by the Risen Lord Jesus Christ through his Apostles?”

More largely, it speaks of God’s purpose that forgiveness of sins be spread far and wide. Yes, forgiveness is conditional. Indeed, after the General Confession (for example) you hear conditions in the Absolution that follows, namely, “heartily repentance and true faith.” “Heartily” means simply, from the

proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.

“Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith [SETH] the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.

“For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith [SETH] the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.

“But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith [SETH] the LORD of hosts.

“Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments.

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twentieth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John.⁵

“The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene [*magg-duh-LEE-knee*] early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other

disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him. Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home.

“But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith [SETH] unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith [SETH] unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith [SETH] unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith [SETH] unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith [SETH] unto him, Rabboni [ra-BOW-nye]; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith [SETH] unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God. Mary Magdalene [magg-duh-LEE-knee] came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her.

“Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so

A saint is, simply, a holy person. In an objective sense you have been made holy by having been separated from the world of sin and death, and set apart unto God. This was done in your baptism. But, in terms of the life you live here on earth, as we also have seen in the Epistles of St. Paul, you have the vocation, that is the *calling*, to become holy, to be a saint, conformed to the image of Christ in this world. Growing in the grace of God and acquiring holy virtues, above all charity, is the vocation every child of God has in common. This we cannot do if we choose to live in the darkness of carnality and selfishness.

The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord, though as yet they did not fully comprehend all that it meant to do so. But they could quickly comprehend that Christ’s Resurrection demonstrated the goodwill, the love and saving intention, of God. Somehow, it meant that everything He had suffered was part of the plan; it demonstrated that He had been in control all along; it meant that the fear and suffering of Friday was not a defeat, but rather the very plan, just as their Master had foretold several times. For example, hear these words from the Gospel of Mark:

“And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him, Saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again.”¹¹

The Resurrection demonstrated that Christ had come to bring salvation, that God had come in peace rather than as an enemy. “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”¹²

because Christ rose again from the dead, we are restored fully and given the inheritance that our first father lost.

We have been allowed to start all over again, and to become God's own children through Christ. This has everything to do with that little two word phrase that St. Paul repeats throughout his Epistles: "*In Christ.*" It is a small phrase, and thus easily overlooked. And, yet, it is our identity in the eyes of God; it is your identity, and has been ever since the day you were baptized into Christ. If you are "*in Christ*" and if you abide and dwell in Christ, God sees you in the Person of His only begotten Son. He sees you in His Son, the one Beloved of the Father in all eternity.

*"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted **in the beloved.**"¹⁰*

That God sees you in the Person of His only begotten Son means that, even beyond forgiveness, you have been justified as if you had never been born in sin, and had never sinned yourself. That is justification; that is adoption as a child of God, that is what it means to be "in Christ."

This is why it is so very tragic when any child of God chooses to live as merely a son of this fallen world ("*For as in Adam all die: even so in Christ shall all be made alive*"). You do not belong to this world of sin and death, and have no business living as if you did. Because we are justified freely in the Risen Christ, we are called to sanctification, that process whereby we become saints.

said, he shewed [**SHOWD**] unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith [**SETH**] unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.

"But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus [**DIDD-ih-moose**], was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

"And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith [**SETH**] he to Thomas, reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith [**SETH**] unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: "*Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.*"⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

This is one of the most important lines in all of Scripture. Our faith is not based on religious concepts and ideas, but on solid fact. They were glad, and that means they saw and believed. When St. Paul summarized the Gospel for the Church in Corinth,⁷ he recited four facts: 1) Christ died for our sins; 2) He was buried; 3) He rose the third day; and 4) He appeared to witnesses. These facts of the Gospel were “according to the Scriptures,” meaning, these facts fulfilled the Scriptural foretelling of the prophets that Messiah would come the first time as priest and sacrifice, and that after His death He would rise again:

“Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.”⁸

He had died as the sin offering, and now He was alive again, a man once dead, but who prolongs His days as the one in whose hand the will of God prospers forever. For a dead man to prolong his days, he must rise again. And what is the will of God that prospers in his hand? Our Collect for the First Sunday after Easter provides part of the answer: “Almighty Father, who hast given thine only Son to die for our sins, and to rise again for our justification...” These words were drawn from St. Paul’s Epistle to the Church in Rome:

“And therefore it [faith] was imputed to him [Abraham] for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.”⁹

On Good Friday we had a very mournful service, for that was the day in which Christ fulfilled the Scriptures of the

prophets, that He would die as the offering for sin, fulfilling as well the entire symbolic system of sacrifice in the Law of Moses. On that day we saw Him as Passover Lamb and as the Atonement slain on *Yom Kippor*. We saw His soul sorrowful unto death the night before in the garden, and we were with Him at the Cross. On the following Sunday, that is on Easter, we were suddenly glad, sharing the joy of those who first witnessed the sight of the risen Christ. “*And when he had so said, he shewed [SHOWD] unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.*”

Our faith is based on fact. They saw Him risen again, and they witnessed this sight together as a group. Their testimony was a shared testimony, something that by its nature cannot be dismissed as a delusion. His death was a fact, and His Resurrection was a fact. But now we must see not only these facts, but the meaning of these facts. His Resurrection showed that He had been, all along, exactly who he claimed to be. He was vindicated. Indeed, before Abraham, He had been and always was I AM. He was, and throughout eternity had always been, One with the Father. And, yet though He was the one *vindicated*, that is whose words were proved true, it is we who are *justified* freely by His grace.

His vindication was made into our justification, for now Christ Jesus the Lord had taken away sin and had defeated death. If we hold fast and believe, we will spend eternity not only as forgiven sinners, whose Lord died to bring that forgiveness to his people, for even beyond having been forgiven, if we hold fast and believe, we will spend eternity as the children of God through the grace of the risen Lord, fully justified as if we had never sinned at all. We are forgiven because He died, and we are justified because He rose again and ever lives to make intercession for us. That means we have been made righteous, as if we had never sinned at all, in the sight of God. Forgiveness is made richer because of Divine forgetfulness, as the Bible also states plainly: He *forgets* our sins. So, in the eyes of God,