

**SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER**  
**The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity<sup>1</sup>**

**Lessons:**<sup>2</sup>

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the fourth Verse of the third Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel.<sup>3</sup>

“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 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.<sup>4</sup>

“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! <sup>4</sup>O 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. And mine

we believe, and the Church in which we have found both truth and valid sacraments to meet the needs of our own souls, is so good that we must share this wealth. What matters first is that this practical and vital part of our faith is the unshakable conviction of each heart.

“Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.”

It helps a great deal if we know that here, in Christ, is the food and drink of eternal life, the word and ministry of reconciliation with God, and the only true medicine for the soul. Practically speaking, for those of us who have decided to *Continue* the Anglican Way, now it is high time to move forward beyond the legitimate concerns of self-interest. Compelling people to come into God’s house, if we understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is a duty of love. If we are to compel them, charity must compel us.

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The Rev’d Robert Hart<sup>7</sup>  
July 3, 2011

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<sup>1</sup> This sermon was originally written on the Epistle at Mass on the Second Sunday after Trinity.

<sup>2</sup> *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).

<sup>3</sup> Ezekiel 3:4-21 (KJV).

<sup>4</sup> Ezekiel 13:1-16 (KJV).

<sup>5</sup> I John 3:1-end (KJV).

<sup>6</sup> St. Luke 14:16-24.

<sup>7</sup> Rector, St. Benedict’s Anglican Catholic Church, Chapel Hill, NC.

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.<sup>5</sup>

“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 be-

It is safe to say, on the basis of history, that the Church created compassion as a social and cultural norm. Today, we expect to find hospitals and medicine in any inhabited place. We expect courts of law to be about, at the very least, some effort towards justice for all. But, why should we expect these things? If we raise successive generations without a Church that can say, *Thus saith [SETH] the Lord*, we may well expect nothing but cruelty in place of compassion and the exercise of raw power in place of justice.

### 3. We are all missionaries here and now.

“Here,” because we are not living in a Christian culture, except insofar as it is a memory, a memory which cannot long sustain influence over the population. “Now,” because we must act wisely in light of the times.

We have not yet begun to think of ourselves as missionaries, however. We live with the illusions that everybody knows the Gospel, that the churches are filled everywhere, and that most children are raised to know the Ten Commandments and to believe in God.

And, let me be clear. Evangelism is always the mission of the Church, in every place and time. We cannot assume that people know the *Lord* of the Church simply because they have church membership somewhere. But, as it is, if we are to be effective in our own country in this, our generation, it is time to wake up and be realistic about what has happened to the culture all around us.

Ideally, we will embrace the reality of where and when we are as an opportunity to serve God. I do not pretend to have all the answers for the positively best way to present our message. I welcome ideas. But, more important than a solid program of evangelism is the foundation for making the effort; that is, the belief in each heart that the Christ we know, the Gospel

proved right: “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”

## 2. God’s Law is absent.

My younger brother argues in one part of his book *Atheist Delusions* that spokesmen for the new Atheist movement have no logical reason to suppose that ethical or moral principles can be sustained by atheism. Indeed, if they managed to free society from what they call “religion,” each succeeding generation would only find itself brought up farther and farther away from any reason whatsoever even so much as to care about ethical considerations of any kind.

I can tell you what a non-religious society would most resemble, even in terms of its ethical standards: It would most resemble the first twenty minutes or so of the movie *2001 A Space Odyssey*, though likely without the apelike appearance of the people—all hairy. If such a society became ordered it would look like all of the tyrannies of recent times, be they the Nazis or Communists. Ideology would exist, but not ideals that we could recognize.

Above all, even the semblance of two very important things, justice and compassion, would vanish away from the structures of an Atheist society, just as these two things were almost entirely absent in every form of pagan religion known to the real academic discipline of History. Whether the *Suhtees* of India, the strangulation of emperor’s widows in China as late as the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, the daily human sacrifices on Aztec altars, or even centuries before that, the mass human sacrifices by fire among the Celts in the Wicker Man ceremonies, pagan religions have proven themselves to be cruel. Atheism fares no better than paganism, as the Communist regimes demonstrated. They had their very large numbers of human sacrifices too, sacrifices to the god of the State and of ideology that exists in isolation from an absolute moral code from the Divine Lawgiver.

gining, 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:

Today’s Second Lesson speaks clearly about the duties of Christian love, that is, charity (*agape*). It speaks of practical ways to live as a Christian among real people in the real world: “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.” In Our Lord’s parable of the guests invited to a great feast,<sup>6</sup> we see

that another practical way to love our neighbor is to “Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.”

Do we see the mission of the Church, evangelism, as a duty of charity? If we do not see it that way, then it means we fail to believe inwardly the very religion we practice outwardly. We stand at a crossroads, or even better, we are at a fork in the road. It is clear to me, from years of observation, that for a few people the whole idea of *continuing* the old ways of genuine Prayer Book Anglicanism never got beyond the legitimate concern of self-interest.

I do not condemn that. It is right to have enlightened self-interest. The commandment, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,” does little good for someone who lacks enlightened self-interest. It is certainly not intended for those who are self-destructive that they love their neighbor only to the degree that they love themselves. It is right to *love thyself* in the proper sense, which above all is based on loving God. For, if you love God, it is your first duty not to throw away your own soul, and that is because He has placed so great a value on your soul that it was redeemed by the costly and most worthy thing of all, the blood of His only begotten Son. Christ loved you and gave Himself for you. So, enlightened self-interest is part of fulfilling the First and Great Commandment to love the Lord thy God.

Nonetheless, the whole idea of *continuing* the old ways of genuine Prayer Book Anglicanism is quite worthy in itself, if we believe the Gospel at the center of it; and, this is true not merely for own sakes. Right as the legitimate kind of self-interest is, we must move forward beyond its limitations. We have preserved something good and valuable. More than that, we have at the very core of who we are and what we believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the very lifeline needed by each and every human being.

That is why many of our parishes have Evangelism Committees, and it is why we want to reach people in the world around us. The riches of God have been given to us so that we may be generous to those in need. A reality, a kind of law at work, is that the more we give away our spiritual wealth, the richer we become inwardly.

Now let us consider our duty, a duty of charity. Let’s think seriously about the words, “Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in,” in light of where we are and in light of the times. We need to be realistic and practical, which is the only real way to be spiritual. So, where are we, and what are the times?

### **1. Neither the United States nor any Western European country is at present Christian country.**

It has been a long time since anyone could honestly make a case that any of them are. Let us look at something said by the second President of the United States, one of our greatest Founding Fathers, John Adams: “Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”

Without a moral foundation of God’s universal and unchanging Law, what does freedom produce, and what do free people demand of a representative government? Right now mothers are free to have their unborn children assassinated, as long as the assassin has the right professional license. In some U.S. states, with the advent of so-called “same-sex ‘marriage’”, the word “marriage” has finally become utterly meaningless, not just by rampant divorce and immorality, but by a new legal definition that has no *true* meaning whatsoever; for, we know by revelation that God created marriage as part of human life, and that by it a man and a woman become one flesh; we know that He blesses marriages with children. John Adams has been