

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
The Fifth Sunday after Trinity¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the seventeenth Chapter of the First Book of Samuel.³

“Now the Philistines gathered together their armies to battle, and were gathered together at Shochoh [**SHOW-coe**], which belongeth to Judah, and pitched between Shochoh [**SHOW-coe**] and Azekah [**aah-ZEE-kah**], in Ephesdammim [**EE-fess DAMM-imm**]. And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and pitched by the valley of Elah [**EE-luh**], and set the battle in array against the Philistines. And the Philistines stood on a mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side: and there was a valley between them.

“And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. And he had an helmet of brass upon his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail; and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of brass. And he had greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders. And the staff of his spear was like a weaver’s beam; and his spear’s head weighed six hundred shekels of iron: and one bearing a shield went before him. And he stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said unto them, Why are ye come out to set your battle in array? am not I a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul? choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me. If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us. And the Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together. When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed, and greatly afraid.

“Now David was the son of that Ephrathite [**EFF-ruh-thigh**] of Bethlehemjudah [**BETH-leh-hamm JOO-duh**],

whose name was Jesse; and he had eight sons: and the man went among men for an old man in the days of Saul. And the three eldest sons of Jesse went and followed Saul to the battle: and the names of his three sons that went to the battle were Eliab [**EE-lye-abb**] the firstborn, and next unto him Abinadab [**uh-BINN-uh-dabb**], and the third Shammah [**SHAM-uh**]. And David was the youngest: and the three eldest followed Saul. But David went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem. And the Philistine drew near morning and evening, and presented himself forty days. And Jesse said unto David his son, Take now for thy brethren an ephah [**EE-fah**] of this parched corn, and these ten loaves, and run to the camp of thy brethren; And carry these ten cheeses unto the captain of their thousand, and look how thy brethren fare, and take their pledge. Now Saul, and they, and all the men of Israel, were in the valley of Elah [**EE-luh**], fighting with the Philistines.

“And David rose up early in the morning, and left the sheep with a keeper, and took, and went, as Jesse had commanded him; and he came to the trench, as the host was going forth to the fight, and shouted for the battle. For Israel and the Philistines had put the battle in array, army against army. And David left his carriage in the hand of the keeper of the carriage, and ran into the army, and came and saluted his brethren. And as he talked with them, behold, there came up the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, out of the armies of the Philistines, and spake according to the same words: and David heard them. And all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him, and were sore afraid. And the men of Israel said, Have ye seen this man that is come up? surely to defy Israel is he come up: and it shall be, that the man who killeth him, the king will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter, and make his father's house free in Israel. And David spake to the men that stood by him, saying, What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel? for who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God? And the

Father. There is no other resurrection. Everything we and all the human race hunger for, thirst for, yearn for, groan for, is in Christ. For Him we want to prepare, that at His coming He may find in us a mansion, a home, a ready and willing heart.

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November 27, 2011

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Epistle at Mass for the First Sunday in Advent, 2011.

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

³ I Samuel 17:1-54 (KJV).

⁴ *Wisdom* 1:1-end (KJV).

⁵ Romans 13:1-end (KJV).

⁶ Romans 13:12 (KJV).

⁷ Bishop Ordinary, the Diocese of the Holy Cross; Rector, the Cathedral Church of the Epiphany, Columbia, SC.

people answered him after this manner, saying, So shall it be done to the man that killeth him.

“And Eliab [**EE-lye-abb**] his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men; and Eliab’s [**EE-lye-abbz**] anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle. And David said, What have I now done? Is there not a cause?

“And he turned from him toward another, and spake after the same manner: and the people answered him again after the former manner. And when the words were heard which David spake, they rehearsed them before Saul: and he sent for him.

“And David said to Saul, Let no man’s heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine. And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth. And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father’s sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the LORD be with thee.

“And Saul armed David with his armour, and he put an helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with a coat of mail. And David girded his sword upon his armour, and he assayed to go; for he had not proved it. And David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them. And David put them off him. And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd’s bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling

was in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine. And the Philistine came on and drew near unto David; and the man that bare the shield went before him. And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him: for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance. And the Philistine said unto David, Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. And the Philistine said to David, Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field. Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hands. And it came to pass, when the Philistine arose, and came, and drew nigh to meet David, that David hastened, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine. And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him; but there was no sword in the hand of David. Therefore David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword, and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off his head therewith. And when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled. And the men of Israel and of Judah arose, and shouted, and pursued the Philistines, until thou come to the valley, and to the gates of Ekron [EK-rahñ]. And the wounded of the Philistines fell down by the way to Shaaraim [*shay-uh-RAY-imm*], even unto Gath, and unto Ekron [EK-rahñ]. And the children of Israel returned from chasing after the Philistines, and they spoiled

things pertaining to their peace, except for one brief moment on Palm Sunday. Let us recognize our Day of Visitation, the Day when God visits to save us, to heal us, to bless and renew us, and yes, the Day when He visits to chastise His own cause, and finally, our heavenly birthday, when He calls us home.

Despite setbacks and obstacles in our life together, we can say, with St. Francis of Assisi, on this first day of the new Church Year, “Let us begin.” “Let us begin.” We can offer ourselves to our Lord, not for a life of mediocrity, not for a casual brush with God, but for a life of heroic virtue—virtue which He is eager to build in our lives. Let us attempt great things for God, and let us expect great things from God. Our Day of Visitation in our Parish is, as it was with St. Francis, to build this community. In our spiritual warfare let us, like Francis, venture everything: put everything on the line. By the world's standards we may be small and hidden. But as St. Paul said, over and over, God delights in using what is small and hidden and least likely, because He is jealous for His own glory. He delights to use what He can put through the fire, to test and to humble and purify for His purposes.

A great layman once gave us encouragement by telling the story of the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona. That was the year the magnificent Olympic Torch was lit by a paraplegic in a wheel chair with a bow and a flaming arrow, to shoot, and hit the Torch, and set it ablaze. It did not matter how small the arrow, or the flame was, to set all ablaze.

The Day is at hand. Let our Advent prayer be “Come quickly, Lord Jesus.” When the midnight cry goes out, “Behold, the Bridegroom cometh!” we can be like the ten wise virgins with oil in their lamps, who go forth to meet the Bridegroom, and gladsome join the marriage throng.

The Day is at hand. Jesus visits us today in Holy Communion. He is our Life, not an optional added extra. Christ is our very Life. There no other life. There is no other way to the

membrane of millennia of aching and longing for God, of the long deep groaning in anguish of the entire creation, yearning for the Saviour; we are struck during Advent by the travail and desolation of long centuries of preparation, the long preparation of Israel for her Bridegroom.

Then comes the first faint light of a clear, sweet dawn—Mary, and her fiat with God. She becomes the Bridal Chamber of the Word, the Womb of God. In her, the marriage of heaven and earth, of time and eternity, begins. In her, the Daystar dawns, to appear before all men. The Morning Star, Christ, can now rise in our hearts.

Just after the point of greatest darkness, our Saviour comes—in the fullness of time—not just at any old time, but in the fullness of time, when God has got the stage all set, with the full flowering of Greek philosophy, Roman law and Jewish religion. And in the fullness of time, the Baptist’s cry rings out the one word that sums up Advent: REPENT! Wake up! Turn back to God! You are like a letter that has an address! You are like an airplane that has a runway! You are like a page connected with a book! Your destiny is in God. His Kingdom is at hand. “Thy King cometh unto thee.” The Day of the Lord has dawned!

The world says the day is far spent, the night is at hand. St. Paul says, “the night is far spent, the day is at hand.” We may wonder sometimes if we’re going to make it to the Day without end. Here’s a vignette to give you some assurance. After two months in the hospital, a priest was near death. His Day of Visitation had come. His wife held his hand and said to him, “Honey, plead the Blood, and walk toward the Light.” Plead the Blood, and walk toward the Light. Christ is at hand. Our destiny is in God. Our life is hid with Christ in God. Our life in Christ is indestructible.

When Jesus visited Jerusalem, that city, His city, did not know its Day of Visitation. The people there did not know the

their tents. And David took the head of the Philistine, and brought it to Jerusalem; but he put his armour in his tent.”

Or,

Here beginneth the first Chapter of the Wisdom of Solomon.⁴

“Love righteousness, ye that be judges of the earth; think of the Lord with a good heart, and in simplicity of heart seek him. For he will be found of them that tempt him not; and sheweth [SHOW-eth] himself unto such as do not distrust him. For froward thoughts separate from God: and his power, when it is tried, reproveth the unwise. For into a malicious soul wisdom shall not enter; nor dwell in the body that is subject unto sin. For the holy spirit of discipline will flee deceit, and remove from thoughts that are without understanding, and will not abide when unrighteousness cometh in. For wisdom is a loving spirit; and will not acquit a blasphemer of his words: for God is witness of his reins, and a true beholder of his heart, and a hearer of his tongue. For the Spirit of the Lord filleth the world: and that which containeth all things hath knowledge of the voice. Therefore he that speaketh unrighteous things cannot be hid: neither shall vengeance, when it punisheth, pass by him. For inquisition shall be made into the counsels of the ungodly: and the sound of his words shall come unto the Lord for the manifestation of his wicked deeds. For the ear of jealousy heareth all things: and the noise of murmurings is not hid. Therefore beware of murmuring, which is unprofitable; and refrain your tongue from backbiting: for there is no word so secret, that shall go for nought: and the mouth that believeth slayeth the soul. Seek not death in the error of your life: and pull not upon your selves destruction with the works of your hands. For God made not death: neither hath he pleasure in the destruction of the living. For he created all things, that they might have their being: and the generations of the world were healthful; and there is no poison of destruction in them, nor the kingdom of death upon the earth: (For righteousness is immortal:) But ungodly men

with their works and words called it to them: for when they thought to have it their friend, they consumed to nought, and made a covenant with it, because they are worthy to take part with it.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the thirteenth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Romans.⁵

“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God’s ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour. Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk ho-

nestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “[T]he night is far spent, the day is at hand.”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

Secular man sees himself as a letter with no address, as an airplane with no runway, as a page torn from a book, disconnected from anything that went before or that will come after. Secular man says that the NIGHT is at hand, so eat, drink and be merry, for NIGHT is at hand. The day is far spent, the night is at hand.

The Jew knows differently. The Christian knows differently. The DAY is at hand. The Jewish Sabbath begins the evening before, Friday evening at sundown, so that we begin in the darkness and move toward the LIGHT, from the first pale light of dawn to the full blaze of noon-day.

We observe the great feasts the same way as the Jews: the feast begins as a vigil, the evening before, so that we begin in the darkness and move toward the LIGHT. We are always moving toward the Light of Christ.

The flow of the Church year teaches us about turning to Christ, the Light, the way plants turn to the light. Thus, for example, the timing of the Season of Advent: as we approach December 25, the days get shorter. The world is plunged into greater darkness. And during Advent we are struck by the re-