

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
The Fourth Sunday after Easter¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fourth Chapter of the Fifth Book of Moses, called Deuteronomy.³

“Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you. Your eyes have seen what the LORD did because of Baalpeor [**BAY-ull-PEA-orr**]: for all the men that followed Baalpeor [**BAY-ull-PEA-orr**], the LORD thy God hath destroyed them from among you. But ye that did cleave unto the LORD your God are alive every one of you this day. Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons’ sons; Specially the day that thou stoodest before the LORD thy God in Horeb [**HOE-rebb**], when the LORD said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children. And ye came near and stood under the mountain; and

the mountain burned with fire unto the midst of heaven, with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness. And the LORD spake unto you out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice. And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone.

“And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go over to possess it. Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the LORD spake unto you in Horeb [**HOE-rebb**] out of the midst of the fire: Lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female, The likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air, The likeness of any thing that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth: And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the LORD thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven. But the LORD hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day. Furthermore the LORD was angry with me for your sakes, and sware that I should not go over Jordan, and that I should not go in unto that good land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance: But I must die in this land, I must not go over Jordan: but ye shall go over, and possess that good land. Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which he made with you, and make you a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, which the LORD thy God hath forbidden thee. For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.”

Or,

¹² *The Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 69 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

¹³ St. Luke 10:30-37.

¹⁴ I John 4:10-11 (RSV).

¹⁵ St. Matthew 22:37-40 (RSV).

¹⁶ St. Matthew 25:41b-43, 45 (RSV).

¹⁷ I John 4:20b-21 (RSV).

¹⁸ I John 4:8 (RSV).

¹⁹ This belief is a vital point in the fairy tale of Rumpelstiltskin.

²⁰ *Cf.* St. Luke 13:25, 27.

²¹ St. Luke 16:26 (RSV).

²² Priest-in-Charge, Holy Angels Anglican Catholic Mission, Picayune MS. Honorary Canon, The Diocese of the Resurrection, and Honorary Canon and Canon to the Ordinary, The Diocese of New Orleans, The Anglican Catholic Church.

Conclusion:

In other words, the rich man’s treatment of Lazarus—or rather, his failure to treat Lazarus as Lazarus needed to be treated—is our evidence that he did not love God. And where he did not love God, how could he have been expected to spend eternity in God’s presence?

So if the rich man had loved his poor neighbor as much as he loved himself, then he would not have found himself calling out to heaven from the wrong side of that “great chasm [that] has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from [the one side to the other] may not be able...”²¹

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The Rev’d Canon John A. Hollister JD²²
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¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the First 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 37 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxx (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxviii (CIPBC 1963).

³ Deuteronomy 4:1-21 (KJV).

⁴ Isaiah 60:1-end (KJV).

⁵ St. Luke 16:19-end (KJV).

⁶ St. Luke 16:22-23 (RSV).

⁷ The Domestic and Foreign Mission Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S.A.

⁸ *Works*, Vol. 2, 331 (Philadelphia, 1943).

⁹ “Article XII. Of Good Works”, *Articles of Religion*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 605 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

¹⁰ St. Matthew 22:37 (KJV), St. Mark 12:30 (KJV), and St. Luke 10:27 (KJV).

¹¹ Deuteronomy 6:5 (KJV).

Here beginneth the sixtieth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.⁴

“Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee. The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah [**EE-fuh**]; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD. All the flocks of Kedar [**KEY-durr**] shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth [**nih-BYE-ahth**] shall minister unto thee: they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory. Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows? Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish [**TARR-shish**] first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the LORD thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because he hath glorified thee. And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee: for in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy on thee. Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted. The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious. The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow

themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee; The city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel. Whereas thou has been forsaken and hated, so that no man went through thee, I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations. Thou shalt also suck the milk of the Gentiles, and shalt suck the breast of kings: and thou shalt know that I the LORD am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob. For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron: I will also make thy officers peace, and thine exactors righteousness. Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise. The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the LORD shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the LORD shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended. Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified. A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the LORD will hasten it in his time.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the nineteenth Verse of the sixteenth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Luke.⁵

“There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his

just throwing alms to the needy who happen to cross our paths but to actively seeking out and aiding those who require our help. As St. Matthew records Our Lord as saying:

“Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.... Truly, I say unto you, as you did it not unto one of the least of these, you did it not unto me.”¹⁶

The rich man in today’s Gospel forgot this lesson. Had anyone asked him, he undoubtedly would have affirmed that he loved God but, as St. John puts it, “he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also.”¹⁷ Also, “He who does not love does not know God; for God is love.”¹⁸

And if the rich man did not know God, then God did not know him either. You will notice in that in the Gospel account, the poor man is named; he was Lazarus. But not once is the rich man named. A name is not just evidence of one’s identity but, in ancient times, was believed to have a real connection with the essence of one’s being. So when two persons were introduced by name, one to the other, when each was “made known to” the other, then each was in effect entrusted with a little piece of the other’s being.¹⁹

Also, when a Jewish child was named on the eighth day after birth, either by circumcision or by being presented in the Temple, that child was, in effect, being introduced to God so that he or she would thereafter be known to God. The same is true in our Christian baptisms. So one subtext in this parable is the suggestion that God did not know the rich man²⁰ and, therefore, could not be expected to invite someone He did not know to share His dwelling.

was so oblivious to the unfortunate that daily as he left his house, he passed the beggar outside his gate without ever even noting his existence. The rich man's preoccupation with his important affairs and his evident self-love could only have been so extreme because he gave no thought to God or to what God would have had him do.

So, as the parable shows, being a person who would not be comfortable living in the presence of God, then after his death he was permitted to live outside that presence, that is, in hell.

This parable was not the only one in which Our Lord made this same point. The famous story of the Good Samaritan, which is likewise reported by St. Luke,¹³ is at bottom the same: the priest and the Levite, preoccupied with their ritual duties at the Temple in Jerusalem, did see the wounded man but responded only by avoiding him so they would not become ritually unclean and so be unable to perform their liturgical functions. Only the despised Samaritan, an hereditary enemy of the Jews—and viewed by them as an heretic—bothered to stop and see to the needs of one from whom he could expect neither gratitude nor thanks.

As St. John wrote in the same Epistle from which we have already quoted, “In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”¹⁴ The only adequate response to that love is the one Jesus set before us and that St. Matthew recorded in these words: “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.’”¹⁵

St. Luke's account of the rich man and the beggar is not the only testimony in the Gospels to the importance of our not

bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried; and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes, and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus in his bosom.”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Introduction:

We live in an age when, for most people of good will, including for most of the Christians around us, the old controversy between salvation by faith and salvation by works has been resolved, and resolved decisively, in favor of salvation by works. We are told that the Christian Church is primarily a great, historic, and widely-respected social service agency and that its primary function is, and therefore its essential focus

must be, on promoting peace, abolishing hunger, curing disease, and, above all, upon frustrating the traditional independent foreign policy of the United States in favor of some vague, Pan-European policies of appeasement of terrorists and thugs and denial of threats to national security and integrity.

These tendencies are so well-entrenched that even as far back as the 1970s, one large mainline Protestant church in the U.S.,⁷ in its perhaps misplaced zeal for social change, was spending its worshippers' donations to buy armaments for Communist terrorists in Mozambique. These same tendencies to value action, even ill-considered action, above devotion are so persistent that just a few years ago, that same denomination urged its members to jettison the traditional Good Friday observance of the Stations of the Cross and to replace them with meditations upon the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals.

Those are essentially an elaborate "guilt trip" that demands increased subsidies to supposedly "developing" countries. There, if past experience is anything by which to judge, the extra cash will be diverted to numbered bank accounts in Basel, Geneva, the Cayman Islands, and Curaçao, whence it can be drawn to subsidize the jet-setting, Eurotrash lifestyles of the recipient countries' elites.

Theme:

Certainly, there is a relationship between faith and good works, but the "Social Gospel" approach—that is, viewing Christianity as primarily a relief or charitable agency—runs the risk of our focusing so strongly on the needs of this world that we lose sight of those of the next one. In our human concerns, even in our legitimate human concerns, for our fellow creatures, we must never forget God the Creator, the God Who so loves us that He sent His Son to die for us and Whose love is our true motivation for doing good to others.

Development:

As Martin Luther wrote, "Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works."⁸ He is echoed in our twelfth Article of Religion: "Albeit that Good Works, which are the fruits of Faith, and follow after Justification, cannot put away our sins,... they are pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and spring out necessarily of a true and lively Faith; insomuch that by them a lively Faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit."⁹

This explanation rests, ultimately, on one of Our Lord's statements in the three Synoptic Gospels,¹⁰ which itself is based upon a commandment in Deuteronomy: "[T]hou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."¹¹ Jesus's words in those three Gospel accounts are conflated in our service of Holy Communion, where we call them "the Summary of the Law". The Prayer Book version goes like this:

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."¹²

This rule, that our love of God will show forth in our love of our neighbors, and therefore that our love for God may be measured by how we show our love to those neighbors, is the explanation for today's Second Lesson. Saint John's First Epistle General warns us that "love is of God", which implies that if we are not truly people of love, we do not truly love God and therefore cannot expect to spend eternity dwelling with the One whom we do not love.

The passage from St. Luke's Gospel which forms today's Second Lesson illustrates this principle clearly. The rich man in the parable not only did not love his poor neighbor, he