

**SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER**  
**The Second Sunday after the Epiphany<sup>1</sup>**

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

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the forty-ninth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.<sup>3</sup>

“Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far; The LORD hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name. And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me; And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified. Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God.

“And now, saith [SETH] the LORD that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my strength. And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth. Thus saith [SETH] the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee. Thus saith [SETH] the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew [SHOW] yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places. They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall

lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them. And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted. Behold, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim [**SIGH-nimm**].

“Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the LORD hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the first Chapter of the General Epistle of James.<sup>4</sup>

“James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways. Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it

Dean Stephens, which this parish often uses as a closing “choir prayer” at the end of each Eucharist:

“Go with us, O heavenly Father, into the world. Mold us, make us, and shape us into the Image of Christ, that men may take notice that we have been with Jesus, and so join with us in thy house to praise His holy Name, who died and rose again for us, thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

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The Rev’d Canon John A. Hollister, JD<sup>10</sup>  
May 5, 2013

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<sup>1</sup> This sermon was originally written on the Epistle for the Eucharist on Rogation Sunday, 2013.

<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 32 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxiv (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxii (CIPBC 1963).

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 49:1-13 (KJV).

<sup>4</sup> James 1:1-end (KJV).

<sup>5</sup> James 1:27 (KJV).

<sup>6</sup> James 2:14 & 17 (KJV).

<sup>7</sup> James 1:27 (KJV).

<sup>8</sup> PAUL VI, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *EVANGELII NUNTIANDI* (December 8, 1975): *AAS* 68 (1976), 20.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

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true and lively Faith; insomuch that by them a lively Faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit.”

So there you have it: in our traditional view, both faith and works are necessary for salvation. First comes faith, because without that, we cannot know Christ. But once we have accepted Him, and believe on Him, then that faith, if it be a true faith, must necessarily change our lives for the better. And one of the ways it changes our lives is by motivating us to do good in this world.

### **Conclusion:**

Now we have reached the conclusion of this sermon, which is the section in which I am supposed to give you some words to live by, or at least to show you how what has gone before applies to your personal situations. And I think we can find that application in a telling phrase of the late Pope Paul VI, who referred to something he called “the witness of life”.<sup>8</sup> It is when people receive this “witness of life”, he said, that they become open to hearing what he termed “the word of life”,<sup>9</sup> that is, the Gospel message.

At the risk of making a pun about the Gospel as “the Good News”, I must tell you this business of “the witness of life” is a classic “good news/bad news” situation. The “good news” is that all of us *can*, with God’s grace, give to the world that “witness of life”. But the capacity to do something is not the same thing as is actually performing it.

So the counterbalancing “bad news” is that, unless we so dedicate ourselves that our personal and Church lives *do* give that witness, the world will not see Jesus in us and so will not be drawn to Him. Thus we must both recognize this truth and pray for strength to abide by it, for which there are no better words than those of our late, and saintly, Archbishop Michael

is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

### **Text:**

From the Second Lesson: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”<sup>5</sup> In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

### **Introduction:**

In our days, well-read Christians best remember the General Epistle of James for a reason that has nothing to do

with the Apostle James himself or with the audience to which he was writing, but has everything to do with events in the Western portion of the Church that occurred a millennium and a half after the New Testament period. That is, we most often hear about James' book because it was so disliked by a 16th-Century German university professor of New Testament. This was a former Augustinian friar named Martin Luther, who wrote that this is "a right strawy Epistle"—meaning it gives one no more support than a straw—because "it has no evangelical matter about it"—that is, it is useless for the propagation of the Gospel.

Luther, as is well known, based his new theology on what are called "the five *Solas*" of the Reformation. "*Sola*" is the Latin word from which we get "sole", meaning "only", and the term "five *Solas*" is taken from the famous Latin formulation, "*Sola scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia, solus Christus, et soli Deo Gloria*". This means, in English, "Only through Scripture, only by faith, only by grace, only Christ [as mediator between mankind and God], only to God the glory [of salvation]".

### **Theme:**

Each of these "*Solas*" could itself absorb a full-semester course in theology, so we cannot here go into most of them, even in the most cursory fashion. But the two that caused Luther's ire toward St. James' Epistle are "*sola gratia*", "only by grace", and "*sola fide*", "only through faith", which taken together mean that, in the Reformers' view, salvation comes only as a free gift from God, without any action or cooperation on our part, and that we are able to receive the benefit of that gift only through a personal, saving faith in Jesus Christ as Savior.

Therefore, Luther objected mightily to James' statement, which seems to undercut those two "*Solas*": "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works, can faith save him? ... Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone."<sup>6</sup>

### **Development:**

That is St. James' statement of a principle, namely that if we claim to have true Christian faith, but that faith is not manifested in the manner in which we live our lives, and especially is absent from the manner in which we deal with our fellow men and women, then the faith we claim is mere empty lip service and not a living, vibrant part of our existence.

The practical implications of this principle are set out in the passage from today's Second Lesson which I gave you as the text for this sermon: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."<sup>7</sup> In other words, St. James is telling us that an essential component of a mature Christian faith is to do good works.

Now whatever one's personal position may be on at least three of the "*Solas*", no one in this post-Medieval era is likely to dispute that salvation is, in its essence, a free gift from God or that personal faith plays a critical rôle in our obtaining that salvation. So in balancing the scales between what Luther seemed to be saying and what St. James says, the question becomes not whether salvation requires faith *or* requires good works but, instead, if, in some way, salvation requires *both* faith and works, then how are the two related?

For Anglicans, at least, the answer is readily to be found. It is on page 605 at the back of your Prayer Books, in Article XII of the Articles of Religion. Entitled, helpfully, "Of Good Works", this passage says:

"ALBEIT that Good Works, which are the fruits of faith, and follow after Justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's judgment; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a