

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER
The Sunday Next Before Advent¹

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Priest-in-Charge

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the second Chapter of Haggai.³

“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 [**zeh-RUBE-uh-bull**] the son of Shealtiel [**shih-AHL-tih-ell**], governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech [**DGAHS-uh-deck**], 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 [**zeh-RUBE-uh-bull**], saith [**SETH**] the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech [**DGAHS-uh-deck**], 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.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

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 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 purifer 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 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-**

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 Colossians 3:2.

On the other hand, if you are not able to get beyond your own finitude, the Apostle says this about you: “The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them, for they are spiritually discerned.”

The gifts of the Spirit, of which he speaks, are manifold and are catalogued elsewhere in his writings, but today we focus on the one gift that most of us value above all. We say in the creed that the Holy Spirit is “the Lord and giver of life”, and we mean by that that the Spirit not only breathes life into us at our conception, but also that He unites us to Jesus in His death and in His Resurrection from the dead.

The gift of eternal life with Jesus in glory is available to all who are willing to receive it in faith, setting aside the limitations we impose on ourselves when we focus attention on what we can see and touch. It is for such faith that I will now pray in behalf of all present, and with this prayer I will conclude.

“O God, whose blessed Son did manifest himself to his disciples in the breaking of bread; open, we pray thee, the eyes of our faith, that we may behold thee in all thy works; though the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

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St. David’s Anglican Catholic Church
Charlottesville, Virginia

April 8, 2012

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Mass on Easter Day, 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

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 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.

Homily:

In this evening's Second Lesson, two of Our Lord's disciples go looking for His dead body. They don't find it. All they find is the shroud in which His body was wrapped when it was placed in the tomb.

Whether or not The Shroud of Turin is actually that shroud does not interest me. What does interest me is the fact that no search for His dead body, and there been many, has ever been successful because Jesus is alive.

Now when I say that I don't mean that the body which Jesus once occupied has been resuscitated. It has not been resuscitated; it has been transformed. It has been transformed into what St. Paul calls "a spiritual body."

Spiritual entities are not subject to the laws of physics as we know them. The resurrection body of Jesus is as able to pass through solid objects, as it did when he appeared on Easter night in a locked room. His resurrection body is able to appear and disappear quickly as it did on the road to Emmaus [ee-MAY-uss] and in other places far away from each other.

There was a period of forty days after Easter when Jesus presented His resurrection body to His disciples. At the end of that forty day period, His body ascended to the heavenly regions, and has been represented on earth ever since by The Holy Spirit.

In His resurrection body, Jesus is able seated in glory at the right hand of the Father in Heaven, and still He is represented by The Holy Spirit in the small group of two or three people gathered in His name in a basement somewhere. He is in a cell with the prisoner who prays for forgiveness and strength, and also with the suffering orphan in Haiti. He is with the Coptic Christians in Egypt whose churches have been

burned and whose lives have been threatened. He is also with everyone who calls upon Him in the moment of his or her death.

The body of Jesus is still able to present itself to our senses in various ways, but especially in the bread and wine that we call upon God to bless in His name. But His body and blood can only be discerned by faith.

In order for us to perceive the presence of the living Jesus, we need to be able to get outside of our finitude and of our own bondage to time and to space and to physicality. We need to understand that there are realities in the universe beyond what we can measure and perceive with our physical senses. We need to be receptive to such realities. And we especially need to be able to accept the testimony of those who were specifically chosen by Jesus to be witnesses of His resurrection.

There are people who do not seem to be able to do that. St. Thomas was one of them. When told that some of his fellow disciples had seen Jesus alive, Thomas said, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe."

Thomas needed help in dealing with spiritual reality. Jesus accommodated him by appearing and displaying His wounds. He then said, "Thomas, you have believed because you have seen me. Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe."

Well, that's us. At least it's those of us who are able to perceive what cannot be measured, or quantified, or comprehended with our finite minds and our limited senses.

If you are such a person, St. Paul says to you as he says to the Colossians, to focus on those things. "Set your minds," he says, "on things that are above, not on things that are on earth."⁶ Your faith, in other words, should make a difference in the way you think and in the way you live.