

**SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER  
THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT**

**Lessons:**<sup>1</sup>

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the thirty-seventh Chapter of the First Book of Moses, called Genesis.<sup>2</sup>

“And Jacob dwelt in the land wherein his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan [**KAY-nunn**]<sup>3</sup>. These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah [**BILL-hah**]<sup>4</sup>, and with the sons of Zilpah [**ZILL-puh**]<sup>5</sup>, his father’s wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report. Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours. And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.

“And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it his brethren: and they hated him yet the more. And he said unto them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed: For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf. And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words.

“And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me. And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth? And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying.

“And his brethren went to feed their father’s flock in Shechem [**SHECK-umm**]<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>13</sup>And Israel said unto Joseph, Do not thy brethren feed the flock in Shechem [**SHECK-umm**]<sup>7</sup>? come, and I will send thee unto them. And he said to him, Here am I. And he said to him, Go, I pray thee, see whether it be well with thy brethren, and well with the flocks; and bring me word again. So he sent him out of the vale of Hebron, and he came to Shechem [**SHECK-umm**]<sup>8</sup>.

“And a certain man found him, and, behold, he was wandering in the field: and the man asked him, saying, What seekest thou? And he said, I seek my brethren: tell me, I pray thee, where they feed their flocks. And the man said, They are departed hence; for I heard them say, Let us go to Dothan [**DOE-thunn**]<sup>9</sup>. And Joseph went after his brethren, and found them in Dothan [**DOE-thunn**]<sup>10</sup>. And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him. And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh. Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams. And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him. And Reuben said unto them, Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him; that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again.

“And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stript Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colours that was on him; And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it. And they sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmeelites [**ISH-may-ell-ights**]<sup>11</sup> came from Gilead [**GILL-ih-udd**]<sup>12</sup> with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt. And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites [**ISH-**

**may-ell-ights]**,<sup>13</sup> and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh. And his brethren were content. Then there passed by Midianites [**MIDD-ih-unn-ights]**<sup>14</sup> merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites [**ISH-may-ell-ights]**<sup>15</sup> for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt.

“And Reuben returned unto the pit; and, behold, Joseph was not in the pit; and he rent his clothes. And he returned unto his brethren, and said, The child is not; and I, whither shall I go? And they took Joseph’s coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood; And they sent the coat of many colours, and they brought it to their father; and said, This have we found: know now whether it be thy son’s coat or no. And he knew it, and said, It is my son’s coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces. And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him. And the Midianites [**MIDD-ih-unn-ights]**<sup>16</sup> sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar [**POTT-ih-furr]**,<sup>17</sup> an officer of Pharaoh’s, and captain of the guard.”

*Or,*

Here beginneth the twelfth Verse of the tenth Chapter of the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus.<sup>18</sup>

“... The beginning of pride is when one departeth from God, and his heart is turned away from his Maker. For pride is the beginning of sin, and he that hath it shall pour out abomination; and therefore the Lord brought upon them strange calamities, and overthrew them utterly. The Lord hath cast down the thrones of proud princes, and set up the meek in their stead. The Lord hath plucked up the roots of

the proud nations, and planted the lowly in their place. The Lord overthrew countries of the heathen, and destroyed them to the foundations of the earth. He took some of them away, and destroyed them, and hath made their memorial to cease from the earth. Pride was not made for men, nor furious anger for them that are born of a woman. They that fear the Lord are a sure seed, and they that love him an honourable plant; they that regard not the law are a dishonourable seed; they that transgress the commandments are a deceivable seed. Among brethren he that is chief is honourable; so are they that fear the Lord in his eyes. The fear of the Lord goeth before the obtaining of authority: but roughness and pride is the losing thereof. Whether he be rich, noble, or poor, their glory is the fear of the Lord. It is not meet to despise the poor man that hath understanding; neither is it convenient to magnify a sinful man. Great men, and judges, and potentates, shall be honoured; yet is there none of them greater than he that feareth the Lord.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the Eleventh Verse of the nineteenth Verse of the tenth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews.<sup>19</sup>

“... Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. For if we sin wilfully after that we have received

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<sup>21</sup> Numbers 15:30-31; Deuteronomy 17:12. See HERBERT G. MAY AND BRUCE M. METZGER, EDS., THE NEW OXFORD ANNOTATED BIBLE WITH THE APOCRYPHA, EXPANDED EDITION, REVISED STANDARD VERSION 1458-1459 fn. (Oxford University Press, 1977).

<sup>22</sup> Numbers 15:22-29.

<sup>23</sup> Hebrews 9:26.

<sup>24</sup> Hebrews 8:13 (RSV); cf. Hebrews 10:1-4.

<sup>25</sup> St. Mark 11:26 (RSV) in MAY AND METZGER, *op. cit.* 1230 note w.

<sup>26</sup> St. Matthew 6:12-15.

<sup>27</sup> Genesis 3:1-24.

<sup>28</sup> Article IX, “Of Original or Birth-Sin”, *The Articles of Religion*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 604 (PECUSA 1928).

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which they wrote in Genesis.<sup>27</sup> Thus if God would forgive us only once in our lives, then every single one of us would be irredeemably lost, for every single one of us sins, and sins again, even after we are baptized and so joined to Christ.

But God has had mercy on us, and has made it possible for us to be accounted righteous, that is, to be treated as though we were righteous, even though in fact we remain very far gone from original righteousness.<sup>28</sup>

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The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister<sup>29</sup>  
March 27, 2011.

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<sup>1</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 35 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxvii (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxv (CIPBC 1963).

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 37:1-end (KJV).

<sup>3</sup> W. MURRAY SEVERANCE, PRONOUNCING BIBLE NAMES 25 (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1985), alt.

<sup>4</sup> SEVERANCE, *op. cit.* 24, alt.

<sup>5</sup> SEVERANCE, *op. cit.* 79, alt.

<sup>6</sup> SEVERANCE, *op. cit.* 69, alt.

<sup>7</sup> SEVERANCE, *op. cit.* 69, alt.

<sup>8</sup> SEVERANCE, *op. cit.* 69, alt.

<sup>9</sup> SEVERANCE, *op. cit.* 29, alt.

<sup>10</sup> SEVERANCE, *op. cit.* 29, alt.

<sup>11</sup> SEVERANCE, *op. cit.* 42, alt.

<sup>12</sup> SEVERANCE, *op. cit.* 35, alt.

<sup>13</sup> SEVERANCE, *op. cit.* 42, alt.

<sup>14</sup> SEVERANCE, *op. cit.* 42, alt.

<sup>15</sup> SEVERANCE, *op. cit.* 56, alt.

<sup>16</sup> SEVERANCE, *op. cit.* 42, alt.

<sup>17</sup> SEVERANCE, *op. cit.* 64, alt.

<sup>18</sup> *Ecclesiasticus* 10:12-24 (KJV).

<sup>19</sup> Hebrews 10:19-end (KJV).

<sup>20</sup> Hebrews 10:26-27 (RSV).

the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith [SETH] the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

**Text:**

From the Second Lesson: "For if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire which will devour the adversaries."<sup>20</sup>

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

### **Development:**

In Christian ears, this text has a peculiar sound, because we are so accustomed to hearing that Christ died as a sacrifice for our sins. But these words are taken from a longer allocution, in which the author of Hebrews is explaining to his readers that the religious landscape has been altered suddenly and completely by Our Lord's action. It is as though a landmark such as a mountain were instantly collapsed by a great earthquake, so that a familiar point of reference were no longer visible to guide us.

What the author is describing in these words is the situation as it existed under the Old Testament covenants. Then, there existed no atoning sacrifice for deliberate and defiant sins,<sup>21</sup> but only for offenses committed in ignorance or carelessness.<sup>22</sup>

But with the coming of Christ, and His one, all-sufficient atoning sacrifice, this has now changed.<sup>23</sup> "In speaking of a new covenant he treats the first as obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away."<sup>24</sup> As it says immediately before today's Second Lesson: "I will remember their sins and their misdeeds no more."

One of the great trials of the early Church was the struggle between those who understood that this forgiveness is complete and unlimited and those who held that our Baptism into Christ forgives only those sins we had committed before Baptism and that we are bound forever by those we commit after Baptism. This second opinion held, in effect, that Christ's power is itself limited, because it operates only once in each person's life and, like a "Get out of jail free"

card in the game of Monopoly, once used, it becomes worthless.

The people who held this narrow view of Christ's atoning work were called "Donatists" [**DOE-nah-tists**] because they followed the teachings of one Donatus [**DOE-nah-tuss**]. At one time, they were very prevalent; for example, the great Doctor of the Church St. Augustine [**awe-GUSS-tin**] of Hippo spent his entire episcopate in North Africa surrounded by them, one of a Catholic minority in a sea of heretics.

But not only does the Donatist [**DOE-nah-tist**] heresy impermissibly limit our understanding of the plenary nature of God's grace, it contradicts the plain words of Scripture: "But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your trespasses."<sup>25</sup> Thus the words of the Lord's Prayer are clearly addressed to those who have already joined the Church, that is, who have already been baptized:

"And forgive us our debts,  
As we gave also forgiven our debtors...."<sup>26</sup>

Thus they enjoin us to forgive others so that we may, once again, be forgiven ourselves, and it is that "once again" that contradicts the Donatists [**DOE-nah-tists**].

### **Conclusion:**

Thank goodness – or, rather, thank God – that the Donatists [**DOE-nah-tists**] were wrong, because while the coming of Christ and His sacrifice altered our relationship to God, making it possible for us to be saved despite our sins, they did not change our fundamental nature.

That is, even after Baptism, we still possess that in-born propensity to sin that the ancients noted and about