

**SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER**  
**The Third Sunday after Easter<sup>1</sup>**

**The Rev. Warren E. Shaw,<sup>2</sup> Supply Priest**

**Lessons:<sup>3</sup>**

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the twenty-second Chapter of the Fourth Book of Moses, called Numbers.<sup>4</sup>

“And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in the plains of Moab on this side Jordan by Jericho.

“And Balak [**BAY-lack**] the son of Zippor [**ZIP-pawr**] saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. And Moab was sore afraid of the people, because they were many: and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel. And Moab said unto the elders of Midian, Now shall this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field. And Balak [**BAY-lack**] the son of Zippor [**ZIP-pawr**] was king of the Moabites at that time. He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam [**BAY-lumm**] the son of Beor [**BEE-awr**] to Pethor [**PEE-thawr**], which is by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me: Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed. And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the rewards of divination in their hand; and they came unto Balaam [**BAY-lumm**], and spake unto him the words of Balak [**BAY-lack**]. And he said unto them, Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as the LORD shall speak unto me: and the princes of Moab abode with Balaam [**BAY-lumm**]. And God came unto Balaam [**BAY-lumm**], and said, What men are these with thee? And Balaam [**BAY-lumm**] said unto God, Balak [**BAY-lack**] the son of Zippor [**ZIP-pawr**], king of Moab, hath sent unto me, saying, Behold, there is a people

come out of Egypt, which covereth the face of the earth: come now, curse me them; peradventure I shall be able to overcome them, and drive them out. And God said unto Balaam [**BAY-lumm**], Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed. And Balaam [**BAY-lumm**] rose up in the morning, and said unto the princes of Balak [**BAY-lack**], Get you into your land: for the LORD refuseth to give me leave to go with you. And the princes of Moab rose up, and they went unto Balak [**BAY-lack**], and said, Balaam [**BAY-lumm**] refuseth to come with us.

“And Balak [**BAY-lack**] sent yet again princes, more, and more honourable than they. And they came to Balaam [**BAY-lumm**], and said to him, Thus saith [**SETH**] Balak [**BAY-lack**] the son of Zippor [**ZIP-pawr**], Let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me: For I will promote thee unto very great honour, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me: come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people. And Balaam [**BAY-lumm**] answered and said unto the servants of Balak [**BAY-lack**], If Balak [**BAY-lack**] would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more. Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the LORD will say unto me more. And God came unto Balaam [**BAY-lumm**] at night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do. And Balaam [**BAY-lumm**] rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab.

“And God’s anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him. And the ass saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field: and Balaam [**BAY-lumm**] smote the ass, to turn her into the way. But the angel of the LORD stood in a path of the vineyards, a wall being on this side, and a wall on that side. And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she thrust herself unto the wall, and crushed

in society, maybe even your life, in order to demonstrate your faith.

But one thing you do not have to do is to keep the messianic secret, because now the secret is out.

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St. Thomas Episcopal Church  
Orange, Virginia

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<sup>1</sup> This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion for the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, according to the Revised Three-Year Common Lectionary, Year B, 2006.

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<sup>3</sup> *An Alternative Table of Lessons*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, WITH THE ADDITIONS AND DEVIATIONS PROPOSED IN 1928 37 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxx (South Africa 1954); *The Table of Lessons*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxviii (CIPBC 1963).

<sup>4</sup> Numbers 22:1-35 (KJV).

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 57:15-end (KJV).

<sup>6</sup> St. Mark 5:21-end (KJV).

<sup>7</sup> St. Mark 5:42-43 (RSV).

Balaam's **[BAY-lumz]** foot against the wall: and he smote her again. And the angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a narrow place, where was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she fell down under Balaam **[BAY-lumm]**: and Balaam's **[BAY-lumm]** anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff. And the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam **[BAY-lumm]**, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times? And Balaam **[BAY-lumm]** said unto the ass, Because thou hast mocked me: I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee. And the ass said unto Balaam **[BAY-lumm]**, Am not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day? was I ever wont to do so unto thee? And he said, Nay. Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam **[BAY-lumm]**, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face. And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? behold, I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me: And the ass saw me, and turned from me these three times: unless she had turned from me, surely now also I had slain thee, and saved her alive. And Balaam **[BAY-lumm]** said unto the angel of the LORD, I have sinned; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me: now therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again. And the angel of the LORD said unto Balaam **[BAY-lumm]**, Go with the men: but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak. So Balaam **[BAY-lumm]** went with the princes of Balak **[BAY-lack]**.”

*Or,*

Here beginneth the fifteenth Verse of the fifty-seventh Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.<sup>5</sup>

“... For thus saith **[SETH]** the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit,

to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made. For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners. I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith [SETH] the LORD; and I will heal him. But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith [SETH] my God, to the wicked.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the twenty-first Verse of the fifth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Mark.<sup>6</sup>

“... And when Jesus was passed over again by ship unto the other side, much people gathered unto him: and he was nigh unto the sea. And, behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus [DGEYE-russ] by name; and when he saw him, he fell at his feet, And besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live. And Jesus went with him; and much people followed him, and thronged him. And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years, And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, When she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment. For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole. And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague. And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes? And his disciples said unto him, Thou seest the multi-

As I was writing this sermon, a Latin phrase kept running through my head, and I could not for the life of me recall who originally said it. The phrase is “*Credo ut intelligam*”, which means “I believe in order to understand.” I looked through the few theology books that I saved when I retired and could not find the author of that phrase. But I did find this: St. Augustine agrees with it, Thomas Aquinas agrees with it, Søren Kierkegaard agrees with it. Karl Barth agrees with it.

And the author of Hebrews in the Bible agrees with it also. He talks about how Abraham by faith left his home, not even knowing where he was to go. He talks about how Moses by faith spurned his adoption by the daughter of the pharaoh and led the people out of Egypt and across the Red Sea. The writer goes through the role of patriarchs, prophets, kings and martyrs as examples of faith. And St. James also agrees when he writes that faith without works is dead. So I am in very good company when I say that faith is not an act of the intellect, but an act of will.

The messiahship of Jesus is a secret still today from those who do not believe. Still today, you cannot know Jesus as Messiah until you have committed yourself to Him. Only by faith can you know Him as Savior, Healer, Redeemer, Liberator, Giver of New Life, “the one ordained by God,” as St. Peter says, “to be judge of the living and the dead.” Only by faith can you understand who He really is.

Now there may be some here who do not want to experience Christ in that way. Perhaps you are willing to settle for knowing Jesus as simply a great man, a teacher, and a healer. If that’s all you want, you can easily stand apart from Him and pay your respects from a distance. But to see Jesus in the fullness of His glory, you have to have the kind of faith that Jarius [DGEYE-russ] had. You have to walk with Him past the nay-sayers and continue to believe in the face of apparent hopelessness. You have to be willing to lose your job and your standing

Now Jarius [**DGEYE-russ**] could have given up at that point. He could have said, “It’s no use. I’m going to go and join the mourners.” Had he done so, he would probably have limited the damage to his reputation. But instead, he continued to believe in Jesus. Did he believe that Jesus could actually raise someone from the dead? Did he believe that Jesus was more than just a healer and a prophet? We cannot be sure, and I suspect that Jarius [**DGEYE-russ**] himself was not really sure of what he was expecting when he walked past the mourners and went with Jesus into the house. But he knew that he still trusted Jesus.

His reward was two-fold. Not only did he receive his daughter back from the dead, he also came to a new and deeper understanding of who Jesus really was. His faith, in other words, led to understanding and not the other way around.

We in the Western world, children of the Enlightenment, heirs of rationalism, tend to think that understanding precedes and produces faith. But really, it is faith that leads to understanding, particularly when it comes to understanding God. Today’s Second Lesson is an illustration of that.

In the United States, on the Fourth of July, we celebrate another illustration of faith as an act of the will rather than an act of the intellect. The Declaration of Independence closes with these words: “With a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.” That, ladies and gentlemen, is faith.

Faith, you see, involves action. Faith involves commitment. Faith involves taking risks. And sometimes faith involves paying a very high price. It is much more than intellectual assent to an unproven proposition. Faith is an act of will, often in opposition to the intellect. And it is the only way to the knowledge of God.

tude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing. But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth. And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague. While he yet spake, there came from the ruler of the synagogue’s house certain which said, Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the Master any further? As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith [**SETH**] unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe. And he suffered no man to follow him, save Peter, and James, and John the brother of James. And he cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and seeth the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly. And when he was come in, he saith [**SETH**] unto them, Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn. But when he had put them all out, he taketh the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying. And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi (**TAHL-ih-thuh KOO-me**); which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise. And straightway the damsel arose, and walked; for she was of the age of twelve years. And they were astonished with a great astonishment. And he charged them straitly that no man should know it; and commanded that something should be given her to eat.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

### **Text:**

From the Second Lesson: “[I]mmediately the girl got up and walked (she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. And he strictly charged them that no one should know this....”<sup>7</sup> In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

## Homily:

There were many people in Biblical times who could heal the sick. But there was only One who could raise the dead. The raising of the dead is a function of the Messiah, and in today's Second Lesson, Jesus performs that function. He performs it, however, in secret, which is consistent with St. Mark's acceptance of what is called "the messianic secret."

All through St. Mark's Gospel, Jesus goes about doing messianic work but telling people not to tell anyone about it. He does that, apparently, because the popular understanding of messiahship was very different from His own. So when Jesus goes in to restore this little girl to life, He allows only five people to witness it. Everyone else is kept outside.

Jesus has already said that the child was not really dead but merely in a deep sleep, perhaps in a comma, as we might say today. In that case, to bring her to consciousness and restore her motor functions would be a great act of healing. As far as most of the people were concerned, that's what had happened.

Only the five people who were allowed inside knew what had really happened, and Jesus told them not to tell. Of the five people who are permitted to witness the raising of the daughter of Jarius [**DGEYE-russ**], three are disciples; the other two are Jarius [**DGEYE-russ**] and his wife.

Now why do you suppose the messianic secret was revealed to those five people and not to anyone else? The answer, in my judgment, is faith. These five people, as opposed to all the others, had demonstrated faith in Jesus. The three disciples had demonstrated faith by leaving behind their careers and following Jesus on His mission of preaching, teaching, and healing. Jesus must have recognized greater faith in them than in the other disciples, because on more than one occasion he se-

lected them to accompany him when the others were left behind.

Peter, it turned out, was the first to declare that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God. James was the first of the Apostles to be martyred for his faith. John was the one who stood at the foot of the Cross when the others had fled. But what about Jarius [**DGEYE-russ**] and his wife? Well, let's look at that for a minute.

Jarius [**DGEYE-russ**] was a prominent and respected man in his community, a ruler of the synagogue, in charge of the religious life of the village. The religious authorities in Jerusalem had nothing but contempt for this peasant rabbi, Jesus, who was, in their opinion, corrupting the people. The Sadducees saw him as a threat to their position in the power structure. The Pharisees said He was in league with the devil, and had not only criticized him but were beginning to plot against Him. But if Jesus was really a healer and a holy man, maybe even a prophet, He was worthy of honor and respect at the very least. So for Jarius [**DGEYE-russ**] to recognize Jesus as a healer and a holy man took a lot of courage.

By coming to Jesus, falling at his feet and asking for his help, Jarius [**DGEYE-russ**] was challenging the leadership of the ecclesiastical structure of which he was a part and thereby jeopardizing his own position in it. That was a price that he was willing to pay in return for the life of his daughter.

So Jarius [**DGEYE-russ**], and presumably his wife, as well as the three disciples, believed in Jesus at least as a holy man and a prophet. But that was only the beginning. As the party approached the house, a group of people came to meet them with the news that the child had died. Even if Jesus was healer and a prophet, there was nothing He could do about that. But Jesus turned to Jarius [**DGEYE-russ**] and said, "Keep on having faith."