

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER
The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity¹

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

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the first Chapter of Book of Nehemiah.³

“The words of Nehemiah [*knee-uh-MY-uh*] the son of Hachaliah [*hack-uh-LYE-uh*]. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu [*KISS-lew*], in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan [*SHOO-shan*] the palace, That Hanani [*huh-NAY-nye*], one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.

“And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven, And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments: Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father’s house have sinned. We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses. Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out un-

to the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there. Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand. O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.

“And it came to pass in the month Nisan [**NYE-san**], in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes [**arr-tuh-ZURK-seas**] the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence. Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid, And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it. And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time. Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah; And a letter unto Asaph [**AY-saff**] the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.”

Or,

Here beginneth the first Chapter of the Book of Daniel.⁴

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

³ Nehemiah 1:1—2:8 (KJV).

⁴ Daniel 1:1-end (KJV).

⁵ Zephaniah 3:1-end (KJV).

⁶ Ephesians 4:1-24 (KJV).

⁷ Ephesians 4:1a (KJV).

the same and the sinful desires of the flesh.” To follow Christ as Savior and Lord and to walk in his ways. We all took those vows.

Some of us took additional vows such as ordination vows or marriage vows. Those vows give us a special status or function within the community of faith but they do not by any means separate us from it. We are all in this together. Clergy and laity, married and single, women and men, we are all in this together.

Some of you are older than I am. Most of you are younger. But it doesn't matter. The vows we have taken have no expiration date. You may someday retire if you have not already done so from whatever career you have chosen, but you can never retire from the vocation to which you have been called.

“With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love” I beseech you to walk in a manner that is worthy of that vocation.

And to help you do that I offer once again the Collect for today. Understand that “prevent” in Cranmer’s usage means “go ahead of” or “precede”. Let us pray.

“Lord, we pray thee that thy grace may always prevent and follow us, and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

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St. David’s Anglican Catholic Church
Charlottesville, Virginia

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¹ This sermon was originally written on the Epistle for Holy Communion on the Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity, 2012.

“In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim [**dgeh-HOY-uh-kim**] king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar [**neb-you-cad-NEZZ-urr**] king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim [**dgeh-HOY-uh-kim**] king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar [**SHY-narr**] to the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god.

“And the king spake unto Ashpenaz [**ASH-peh-nozz**] the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes; Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king’s palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans. And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king’s meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king. Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah [**hann-uh-NYE-uh**], Mishael [**MISH-eh-ull**], and Azariah [**azz-uh-RYE-uh**]: Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar [**bell-teh-SHAZZ-urr**]; and to Hannah [**hann-uh-NYE-uh**], of Shadrach [**SHAD-rack**]; and to Mishael [**MISH-eh-ull**], of Meshach [**MEE-shack**]; and to Azariah [**azz-uh-RYE-uh**], of Abednego [**uh-BED-nih-go**].

“But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs. And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king. Then said Daniel to Melzar [**MELL-zarr**], whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Ha-

naniah [***hann-uh-NYE-uh***], Mishael [***MISH-eh-ull***], and Azariah [***azz-uh-RYE-uh***], Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants. So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days. And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat. Thus Melzar [***MELL-zarr***] took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse.

“As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar [***neb-you-cad-NEZZ-urr***]. And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah [***hann-uh-NYE-uh***], Mishael [***MISH-eh-ull***], and Azariah [***azz-uh-RYE-uh***]: therefore stood they before the king. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm. And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus [***SYE-russ***].”

Or,

Here beginneth the third Chapter of Zephaniah.⁵

“Woe to her that is filthy and polluted, to the oppressing city! She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in the LORD; she drew not near to her God. Her princes within her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves; they gnaw not the bones till the morrow. Her prophets are light and treacherous persons: her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law. The just LORD is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity: every morning

That is one of the marks of a true vocation, but it is not only clergy who experience it. I know a man who retired as a University dean. From time to time he is called out of retirement to take over a college somewhere that is in some kind of temporary trouble. He always says, “Yes” because he knows those phone calls are calls from God and he has no choice but to respond. You can retire from a career, but you can't retire from a vocation.

I myself have come out of retirement three times in order to take charge of a parish. That's the difference between a vocation and a career.

And you too have a vocation. You too have been called of God to a certain way of life, and there will be no peace in your life until you embrace it. You are called to be saints. You are called to be salt in a world that is in decay. You are called to be light in a world of darkness. You have been called, as Abraham was called, to be strangers and pilgrims in the world on a journey to a land that has yet to be revealed.

You have been called as the Jews were called out of Egypt to establish a community ruled by the laws of God. You have been called, as the Apostles were called, to follow Christ and learn His ways. Sometimes that means leaving behind familiar places and people. It always means leaving behind old habits that are appropriate to the life of the world but are not appropriate for citizens of the Kingdom of God. All of that is what the Apostle means when he says, “I beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called”.

The Apostle is not just writing to clergy, and it is not just clergy who are called to a godly life. “There is one body and one Spirit,” he says, “... One Lord, one faith, one baptism.” Clergy and laity alike share in that faith. We all take the same baptismal vows: to “renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world with all covetous desires of

in the traditions of the churches that are not under papal jurisdiction, but each of those words deserves a sermon of its own and I certainly cannot cover all of them this morning. So I am simply going to focus on the one that is prominent in the Second Lesson for today. That word is “vocation”.

A vocation is a calling, specifically from God, to undertake a mission or to enter into a certain way of life. For Roman Catholics that means entering the priesthood or becoming a nun or a monk. When Rome talks about praying for vocations or about a rise or fall in vocations, that’s what it means.

Martin Luther broadened the definition of a vocation to include any activity that someone was called by God to engage in. Some were called to be shoemakers, some were called to be farmers, and so forth. Whatever a man believed he was destined to do and was willing to do to the glory of God was a vocation.

I like Luther and I agree with him as far as he goes but I believe he does not go far enough. There is an element of compulsion in a true vocation that never goes away.

St. Paul begins this portion of his Epistle by calling himself “the prisoner of the Lord”. He wrote this letter from a Roman prison, so he may simply mean that he is in jail because of his testimony to Christ. But I think he means more than that. I think he means that he cannot escape from his calling to be an Apostle. “Woe is me,” he says in I Corinthians, “if I preach not the gospel.”

All the priests I have talked to about the subject when they first heard the call to this way of life said “No!” “No I can’t do that and I don’t want to do it.” But the call kept coming back and kept getting louder until finally they realized that the call was not going to go away and there would be no peace until they said “Yes.” There was no place to hide and nothing else they could do. They were prisoners of Christ.

doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not; but the unjust knoweth no shame. I have cut off the nations: their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant. I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction; so their dwelling should not be cut off, howsoever I punished them: but they rose early, and corrupted all their doings.

“Therefore wait ye upon me, saith [SETH] the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering. In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me: for then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain. I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD. The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.

“Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more. In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack. The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing. I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden. Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her

that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame. At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith [SETH] the LORD.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fourth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians.⁶

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith [SETH], When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual

working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “I ... beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called...”⁷ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

That word “vocation” is one of several that have been coöpted and redefined by the Church of Rome. The word “Catholic” is another. The word “Church” is another. The word “Saint” is another.

I would love to tell you what each of those words really means apart from their Roman redefinitions. I would especially like to tell you how those words are used in the Scriptures and