

mandment we are drawn into the life of Christ, and by being drawn into His life we are drawn into the life of God.

We become friends of the King. We have access to Him at any time. We need no special invitation to join Him at His table. We may sit with Him in silence and enjoy His company. We may ask for what we need, and be confident that we will receive it. That is the relationship that Jesus offers us and desires to have with us. And so He says, “You are my friends if you do what I command you.”

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St. David’s Anglican Church
Charlottesville, Virginia

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¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Sixth Sunday of Easter (the Fifth Sunday after Easter), Year B, according to the Revised Three-Year Common Lectionary, 2006.

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

⁴ Ezekiel 3:4-21 (KJV).

⁵ Ezekiel 13:1-16 (KJV).

⁶ St. John 15:1-end (KJV).

⁷ St. John 15:14 (RSV).

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity¹

The Reverend Warren E. Shaw,² Priest Associate

Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fourth Verse of the third Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel.⁴

“And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them. For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of an hard language, but to the house of Israel; Not to many people of a strange speech and of an hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee. But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted. Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house. Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears. And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith [SETH] the Lord GOD; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear. Then the spirit took me up, and I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of the LORD from his place. I heard also the noise of the wings of the living creatures that touched one another, and the noise of the wheels over against them, and a noise of a great rushing. So the spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the LORD was strong upon me.

“Then I came to them of the captivity at Tel-abib [tell-AY-bibb], that dwelt by the river of Chebar [KEY-barr], and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days. And it came to pass at the end of seven days, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, I have made thee a

watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul.”

Or,

Here beginneth the thirteenth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel (KJV).⁵

“And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy, and say thou unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts, Hear ye the word of the LORD; Thus saith **[SETH]** the Lord GOD; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! O Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts. Ye have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the LORD. They have seen vanity and lying divination, saying, The LORD saith **[SETH]**: and the LORD hath not sent them: and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word. Have ye not seen a vain vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination, whereas ye say, The LORD saith **[SETH]** it; albeit I have not spoken? Therefore thus saith **[SETH]** the Lord GOD; Because ye have spoken vanity, and seen lies, therefore, behold, I am against you, saith **[SETH]** the Lord GOD. And mine hand shall be upon the prophets that see vanity, and that divine lies: they shall not be

The author of Hebrews says, “Let brotherly love continue. ... Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled. ... Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”

St. James says, “Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” St. Peter says, “Have unity of spirit, sympathy, love of the brethren, a tender heart and a humble mind. Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary bless, for to this you have been called that you may obtain a blessing.”

St. Paul says, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” These are all apostolic elaborations of Our Lord’s commandment.

We are able to treat each other that way, or should be able to, because we are all under the authority of the same Lord. We acknowledge the same duty. We are led by the same Spirit. We have similar experiences and similar values. If that were not true it would be very difficult to be friends with each other. We would have very little to say to each other and would probably not be very comfortable in each other’s presence.

But Jesus calls us to friendship with each other by inviting us to friendship with Himself. He says to His disciples, “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.”

To be a friend of Christ is to know the mind of God, because Jesus is the living manifestation, the perfect expression in human form of what the Father desires and intends for us all.

St. John says, “If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.” By our obedience to His com-

laying down His life for us. Such is the friendship that He offers us, and such is the friendship He requires of us with respect to each other.

Friendship, of course, means more than just access and more than just acceptance. Friendship means intimacy. It means sharing secrets. True friendship means that you know what your friend is really like. You know her philosophy of life. You know what he likes and does not like. You know how she thinks. You know his moral standards. You know what motivates her. You know his plans and his dreams, her hopes and her fears. You know the private *persona* that is behind the public *persona*. You know his faults, but you like him anyway. That is what it means to have a friend.

There is a great hunger in the world today for that kind of intimacy. Unfortunately, people today tend to think of intimacy in terms of sex. So when the Bible says that the heart of Jonathan was knit to the heart of David, and that David loved Jonathan as he loved his own soul, there are those who interpret that to mean that the two men were homosexually involved with each other. Definitely an unwarranted assumption.

Some people think, wrongly I hasten to add, that sex will produce intimacy. That is one reason people engage in sexual activity before marriage. In so many cases it is really the intimacy that people want, and the sex is wrongly seen as a necessary component of it.

On the other hand, there are those who shy away from intimacy. They refuse to share experiences or hopes or fears or any other really personal material. They keep their thoughts and their feelings to themselves and hold everyone at a safe psychological distance. In other words, they have no friends, and tend to be very lonely.

The apostolic writers, when they talk about the Church, invariably emphasize both intimacy and chastity among the faithful.

in the assembly of my people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel; and ye shall know that I am the Lord GOD.

“Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar: Say unto them which daub it with untempered mortar, that it shall fall: there shall be an overflowing shower; and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall rend it. Lo, when the wall is fallen, shall it not be said unto you, Where is the daubing wherewith ye have daubed it? Therefore thus saith [SETH] the Lord GOD; I will even rend it with a stormy wind in my fury; and there shall be an overflowing shower in mine anger, and great hailstones in my fury to consume it. So will I break down the wall that ye have daubed with untempered mortar, and bring it down to the ground, so that the foundation thereof shall be discovered, and it shall fall, and ye shall be consumed in the midst thereof: and ye shall know that I am the LORD. Thus will I accomplish my wrath upon the wall, and upon them that have daubed it with untempered mortar, and will say unto you, The wall is no more, neither they that daubed it; To wit, the prophets of Israel which prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and which see visions of peace for her, and there is no peace, saith [SETH] the Lord GOD.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fifteenth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John.⁶

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast

forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. These things I command you, that ye love one another. If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me. If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin. He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause. But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: "You are my friends if you do what I command you."⁷ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

In an ancient oriental kingdom there was a very special class of people known "the friends of the king." These people were on the most intimate terms with the king, and enjoyed privileges that most people could hardly conceive of.

They had the full freedom of the palace and all its resources. They had access to the king at any hour of the day or night without an appointment. They could dine at his table whenever they wanted without an invitation. The friends of the king could enter the royal bedroom first thing in the morning and join the king for breakfast. The king would listen to them, enjoy their company, and grant them special favors and requests.

Such is the status that Jesus offers to all those who acknowledge His kingship and obey His commands. Not everyone enjoys this relationship with Jesus because not everyone acknowledges His authority. Those who acknowledge His kingship are those who obey His commandment. And what does He command? Listen to His words: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

How is it that Jesus has loved us? He has loved us in spite of our sins and with full knowledge of our many shortcomings and faults. He has loved us when we have failed to return His love. He has loved us when our behavior has been totally unacceptable to Him. He will not accept our sinful behavior, and He will not allow us to settle for anything less than a full and true reflection of the nature of God. Nevertheless, Jesus has loved us to the point of