

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER
The Sunday after Ascension Day¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the thirtieth Chapter of the Fifth Book of Moses, called Deuteronomy.³

“And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live. And the LORD thy God will put all these curses upon thine enemies, and on them that hate thee, which persecuted thee. And thou shalt return and obey the voice of the LORD, and do all his commandments which I command thee this day. And the LORD thy God will make thee plenteous in every work of thine hand, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy land, for good: for the LORD will again rejoyce over thee for good, as he rejoiced over thy fathers: If thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, and if thou turn unto the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul.

“For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.

“See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”

Or,

Here beginneth the thirty-fourth Chapter of the Fifth Book of Moses, called Deuteronomy.⁴

“And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo [**KNEE-bow**], to the top of Pisgah [**PIZZ-gah**], that is over against Jericho. And the LORD shewed [**SHOWD**] him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan, And all Naph-tali [**NAFF-tuh-lye**], and the land of Ephraim [**EE-frih-eam**], and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah, unto the utmost sea,

⁸ Judges 2:13 (KJV).

⁹ St. John 4:9 (KJV).

¹⁰ Deacon, The Diocese of New Orleans, The Anglican Catholic Church, serving Holy Angels Anglican Mission, Picayune, MS, and Christ Anglican Catholic Pro-Cathedral Church, Metairie, LA.

And the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, unto Zoar [**ZOE-urr**]. And the LORD said unto him, This is the land which I sware unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither.

“So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor [**be-th-PEA-are**]: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.

“And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.

“And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days: so the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended.

“And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him: and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the LORD commanded Moses.

“And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, In all the signs and the wonders, which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh [**FAY-row**], and to all his servants, and to all his land, And in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses shewed [**SHOWD**] in the sight of all Israel.”

Or,

Here beginneth the seventeenth Verse of the sixty-fifth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.⁵

“For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old

man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them. And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith [SETH] the LORD."

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the first Chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.⁶

"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: To whom also he shewed [SHOWD] himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be wit-

The commission Jesus gave to His disciples is still active and it falls on us. It is now our job to continue to spread the faith to the whole world. We celebrate this season Jesus' Ascension into Heaven. He was taken up into the clouds, and the disciples could only stand staring up into those clouds. The angels there told them that Jesus would return the same way He left them. But in the meantime, there is work to do.

Jesus did His work. Now it is our turn.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, as Thou commanded us, we now work to spread Your Gospel in the world. Grant to us the strength, the grace and the wisdom to carry the Good News of the Gospel to each and every person, bringing them each to You and Your Kingdom. Give to us the words and the dedication to always seek to bring Your light to others. Let that light shine forth in our lives to Your glory. This we ask in Your most blessed Name. Amen.

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The Rev'd Mr. Larry Wagoner, MSW¹⁰
May 20, 2012

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Mass on Ascension 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 38 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxi (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxix (CIPBC 1963).

³ Deuteronomy 30:1-end (KJV).

⁴ Deuteronomy 34:1-end (KJV).

⁵ Isaiah 65:17-end (KJV).

⁶ Acts 1:1-14 (KJV).

⁷ Acts 1:8-11 (KJV).

earth.” At the time of Jesus the known world was a smallish place. Roman geographer Pomponius Mela, who lived around the same time as Jesus, divided the world known at the time into five zones, of which he said only two were habitable. The known world was mostly limited to the area around the Mediterranean, plus northern Africa and parts of Europe. Yet, Jesus was saying His disciples would be sent to the “*uttermost part of the earth.*”

This was the challenge; He was saying, in effect: “You will go anywhere and everywhere. You will spread my word to the entire world. You will go to places and people where you will be hated, despised and reviled – and you may face violence.” If we consider the magnitude of the challenge, it is daunting to say the least.

Imagine your reaction if you were told the same thing. Could you do it? Could you conquer your fear, your anxiety? Not without God’s help. “*But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.*” That help was coming. The Day of Pentecost was coming, when the Holy Spirit would come upon the Apostles and give to them the power, the inspiration, the courage and the drive to carry out Jesus’ charge to them.

With that help, that power and support, the Apostles could do what they had been asked to do. They could carry the Gospel message to not only the Jews of Jerusalem, but also to all of Judea. They could travel beyond Galilee and the Jordan River to plant new congregations, to establish new congregations. They could teach, convert and support the growth of the beginnings of the Church. Even into Samaria they could go, where they would convert many. They could even go to the uttermost parts of the Earth. That is what we do. In Jesus’ day, no one had ever heard of Picayune, Mississippi, where we stand today. No Christian had ever seen the Boley Creek or the Pearl River.

nesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day’s journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus [*al-FEE-uss*], and Simon Zelotes [*zih-LOW-tease*], and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “*But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*”⁷ In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Homily:

Jesus did His work. Now it is our turn.

All Christians are charged with sharing the Gospel news. The disciples who were present as Jesus ascended into heaven Forty Days after the Resurrection were given their orders, orders which fall on all of us who call ourselves Christian.

The disciples had been on quite a roller-coaster ride of emotions and now they were given the greatest challenge in their lives. They went in the span of about six weeks from the triumphant entry into Jerusalem, to the trial of Jesus Christ and the agony of His Crucifixion, then up again as He rose from the dead only three days later, only to tell them He was leaving again.

St. Paul relates to us that even after our Lord's ministry, and His passion, and even during the Forty Days during which He appeared to them after the Resurrection and explained things they could not have understood until they had experienced His death, the Apostles still had many questions: *"When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"*

But our Lord redirected them yet again to His mission and, therefore, to theirs: *"It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power."* *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you,"* Jesus tells them. You don't need to know the times, nor the places, nor the ways that the Father will act. You have your own tasks to complete. And you will receive the power to accomplish those tasks.

In a foreshadowing reminiscent of the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Apostles are told that the power they need for their task will come to them as they are touched by the Holy Ghost. And what is that task? *"Ye shall be wit-*

nesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Consider what that meant. In Jerusalem and Judea, followers of Christ were persecuted bitterly by the Jewish hierarchy. Just as the leaders of the power structure of the Jews feared and hated Jesus Christ, they also hated His followers and were doing their best to search them out and destroy them. But here was Jesus Himself ordering that some of His disciples stay and be witnesses to His works, His power, and His deity. They would indeed "take up the Cross" and follow Him.

Some were being sent to Samaria. Because the disciples were seen as Jews, they would be ostracized and hated in Samaria as well. There was long-standing enmity between the Samaritans and the Jews, despite their living in relative proximity to each other. The Samaritans had remained behind in the Northern Kingdom when most of Israel was carried off into exile in Assyria. The forms of Judaism professed by the two peoples diverged during this period and those who had remained behind intermarried with, and were sometimes influenced by, the new populations the Babylonians moved in to replace the departed Jews. For example, as it says in the book of Judges: *"And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth."*⁸ The long-standing conflicts and distrust between the two people made violence quite possible.

Remember how shocked the Samaritan woman was when Jesus spoke to her at Jacob's Well? *"Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans."*⁹ While our Lord did not reject the woman, and even revealed Himself to her as the Christ, it was quite reasonable of the Apostles to fear this mission to Samaria.

But there was more. Jesus also commanded His followers to bring the Gospel news *"unto the uttermost part of the*