

ple of Israel, who will also know and follow Him. But to “follow Him” means actually to follow – and to live according to -- His words and commandments, not just to give them lip service.

In following Him, these “other sheep” join with those of the ancient tribes who have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior. They become part of one flock, with one Savior, and one God.

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April 14, 2013

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Second Sunday after Easter, 2013.

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

³ Isaiah 40:12-end (KJV).

⁴ Isaiah 41:1-20 (KJV).

⁵ St. John 10:1-16 (KJV).

⁶ St. John 10:16 (KJV).

⁷ St. John 10:16 (KJV).

⁸ St. John 10:16 (KJV).

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SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER The Sunday after Christmas Day¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twelfth Verse of the fortieth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.³

“Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed [SHOWD] to him the way of understanding? Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.

“To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him? The workman melteth a graven image, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold, and casteth silver chains. He that is so impoverished that he hath no oblation chooseth a tree that will not rot; he seeketh unto him a cunning workman to prepare a graven image, that shall not be moved. Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity. Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as

stubble. To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith [SETH] the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth. Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God?

“Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

Or,

Here beginneth the forty-first Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.⁴

“Keep silence before me, O islands; and let the people renew their strength: let them come near; then let them speak: let us come near together to judgment. Who raised up the righteous man from the east, called him to his foot, gave the nations before him, and made him rule over kings? he gave them as the dust to his sword, and as driven stubble to his bow. He pursued them, and passed safely; even by the way that he had not gone with his feet. Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he. The isles saw it, and feared; the ends of the earth were afraid, drew near, and came. They helped every one his neighbour; and every one said to his brother, Be of good courage. So the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, and he that smootheth with the hammer him that smote the anvil, saying, It is ready for the sodering: and he fastened it with nails, that it should not be moved. But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob

In time, He specifically sent some of the Apostles, and especially St. Paul, to minister to Gentiles and those not part of the tribes of Israel, to bring us to Him as well as the Jews. But to receive these benefits, we are required to follow the Gospel as the Word of God.

This was the message Jesus was giving to the Pharisees. The people of God are not just those who are ethnically and culturally pure. They are not just those whose families can trace their roots back to the Exodus from Egypt, or who can count one of the ancient Kings of Israel as among their ancestors.

No, these others who would follow Jesus because of His teaching were also to be accepted by God. Jesus would bring them into heaven with Him as well. These would be known by these signs: “*They shall hear my voice,*”⁷ and they would join with the Jews as part of the family of God, following Jesus as their Lord and Savior. “*There shall be one fold, and one savior.*”⁸ They would follow the Gospel toward God.

Note, it is not that all kinds of varying beliefs and faiths will be under one common umbrella, but rather that many people from a variety of different backgrounds will come together in one faith, one belief to worship one God. People might have come to Jesus from varying backgrounds, but they must choose their common future with Him.

If those who claim the benefits of Jesus’ sacrifice and teachings think that they can call themselves children of God, but need not hear His voice and act on it, or if they think they can claim to be disciples of Jesus’ without following His Gospel, then they fool themselves and place themselves in danger of their very souls.

Jesus did not say, “I appear differently to many different people, with a variety of messages that they can each feel good about.” He said He has other followers who are not of the peo-

establishing a vast, complicated jungle of legalistic rules and minutiae which they were themselves exempt from, and which no person could reasonably be expected to understand or to follow.

Yet, for the Pharisees, anyone who failed to follow any of their rules was labeled as outside the law, unfit for membership in the family of God. These self-appointed rulers held in utter disregard and contempt anyone not of the tribes of Israel and who was, therefore, not under the Old Testament dispensation.

Jesus, however, rejected out of hand this petty legalism, insisting that the criterion for acceptance into the family of God was whether one accepted God and His salvation, not whether one adhered to minor legal trivia instituted by men.

Jesus referred to the Gentiles who would come to hear and follow Him as the “other sheep” who He had who would also hear His voice. We are some of those who are His “other sheep”, and so we should be thankful that He claimed us as well, for by His doing so, we can claim inheritance to the Gospel.

But it is critical to realize that we were not granted some kind of pass from what Christ requires of all His followers. We are not excused from the requirement that we accept Jesus as our Lord. We are not given an option as to other saviors—for there is only one Savior. We are not allowed to blaspheme without penalty. We cannot recognize a panoply of Gods and pick and choose among them at our leisure. We do not have the option of claiming to be Christian while rejecting the Gospel.

The Ten Commandments of God do not become only suggestions for us. It is we who must change, not God. God accepted us as His own, despite that we were not part of the original tribes of Israel. We were part of His creation, and therefore He took a special interest in us, as well as His chosen people.

whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend. Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away.

“Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish. Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought. For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee. Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith [SETH] the LORD, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff. Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the LORD, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel. When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah [SHITT-ah] tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together: That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the LORD hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the tenth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John.⁵

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Gospel: “*And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one flock, and one shepherd.*”⁶ In the

Na~~x~~me of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.
Amen.

Homily:

On the strength of this one line, it might make sense to draw the conclusion that some do—namely, that people of all kinds of backgrounds and faiths and views will be accepted by our Lord as His own and their beliefs—however at odds with the rest of Scripture—will be acceptable. A look at the context in which this line appears, however, casts it in a very different light and gives it an entirely different meaning. Few verses of Scripture have been used to create such dangerous mischief among believers as has this one.

That mischief is the result of taking Scripture out of context, and twisting its clear meaning almost beyond recognition, and is properly called the work of the devil. Just this past week, I heard someone who is a self-declared Wiccan announce that she, too, is a child of Jesus, and that while she worships nature and powers that she does not understand, and engages in the casting of spells and the like, nevertheless she and her Wiccan friends are some of those St. John recorded Our Lord has having referred to as “not of this fold”. That is, she believes they are numbered among those who, although not formally members of Jesus’ Church, also hear His voice and therefore will be saved.

Now, quite apart from the theological confusion that is clearly evident in such a stance, it is necessary for one to completely misunderstand what Jesus was saying in order to reach that woman’s conclusion.

Our Lord was speaking here to a group of Scribes and Pharisees. These were they who had placed themselves at the head of Jewish society, claiming to have been appointed by God to guide and lead the people. These self-appointed rulers of the people of Israel liked to set themselves up as better than others,