

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER

Easter Sunday¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fifty-first Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.³

“Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him. For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.

“Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people. My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.

“Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.

“Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab [RAY-habb], and wounded the dragon? Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over? Therefore the redeemed of the

LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away. I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; And forgettest the LORD thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor? The captive exile hasteneth that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail. But I am the LORD thy God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared: The LORD of hosts is his name. And I have put my words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people.”

Or,

Here beginneth the fourteenth Chapter of the Second Book of Moses, called Exodus.⁴

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they turn and encamp before Pihahiroth [pye-huh-HYE-raath], between Migdol [**MIG-doll**] and the sea, over against Baalzephon [**BAY-ull ZEE-funn**]: before it shall ye encamp by the sea. For Pharaoh [**FAY-row**] will say of the children of Israel, They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in. And I will harden Pharaoh’s [**FAY-rose**] heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh [**FAY-row**], and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD. And they did so.

“And it was told the king of Egypt that the people fled: and the heart of Pharaoh [**FAY-row**] and of his servants was turned against the people, and they said, Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us? And he made ready his chariot, and took his people with him: And he took six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, and

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion for Easter Sunday, 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 36 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxix (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxvii (CIPBC 1963).

³ Isaiah 51:1-16 (KJV).

⁴ Exodus 14:1-end (KJV).

⁵ St. John 20:1-23 (KJV).

⁶ St. John 20:8-10 (KJV).

⁷ St. Luke 24:5-7 (KJV).

⁸ Supply Priest, Holy Angels Anglican Mission, Picayune, MS, and Christ Anglican Catholic Pro Cathedral Church, Metairie, LA.

captains over every one of them. And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh [**FAY-row**] king of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel: and the children of Israel went out with an high hand. But the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh [**FAY-row**], and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pihahiroth [pye-huh-HYE-raath], before Baalzephon [**BAY-ull ZEE-funn**].

“And when Pharaoh [**FAY-row**] drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD. And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.

“And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew [**SHOW**] to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward: But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get me honour upon Pharaoh [**FAY-row**], and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten me honour upon Pharaoh [**FAY-row**], upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen.

“And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Is-

rael; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night. And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.

“And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh’s [FAY-rose] horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, And took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians.

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh [FAY-row] that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them. But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore. And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

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

If death is defeated, then we need not fear it. We can live our lives free from the fear of anything the world can do to us. We are a people truly born again into a new state of life where we are freed from sin and death.

As we are joined with Jesus Christ at our Baptism into a new life created by our Lord when He rose triumphant from the grave, so we can walk forward in that new life unhampered by the old. We stand then, at the precipice of an eternal tomorrow.

By the mighty grace and power of His Resurrection, the pathway to eternity is opened and made accessible to each of us. All the things that once stood in our way are done away with. By the mercy of God we are invited to walk through the gates to eternal life.

What once would have been impossible is become possible to us through Jesus Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf. The power of the devil to stand in our way is destroyed. The victory is won. Death is conquered, evil is defeated.

Alleluia! The Lord is risen! The Lord is risen indeed!

Let us pray.

Holy, Risen Lord, we raise our voices in praise at this Thy Resurrection morning. Let us always be mindful of the mighty victory over sin and death that Thou hast won. Let us never lose sight of Thee, and never cease to remember our debt of praise and thanksgiving which we Thine unworthy servants do wish to provide. This we pray for Thy eternal Kingship over us. Amen.

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The Rev’d Larry Wagoner, MSW⁸
March 31, 2013

for the dead, and the living are not to be found there. Therefore, to seek the living God in a place of the dead is foolish.

Then, the reason that Jesus is no longer in the grave – where the women had themselves seen Him placed: “*He is not here, but is risen.*” He was in the grave before, but no longer. His body was not stolen, nor hidden, but resumed life and is risen. He is not here because He has left this place.

The shock of the Crucifixion could have destroyed the nascent Church, causing it to be stillborn.

The disciples clearly were convinced that the ministry and cause of Jesus Christ had suffered some terrible setback if it not been completely destroyed by its founder’s murder. They did not understand why the events that had happened had to occur as they had.

The words of Jesus Himself, as the angel reminded the grieving women, explain it all: “*Remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.*”

The Crucifixion had to occur because it was an integral part of God’s plan for humanity. The Crucifixion was not a terrible accident that resulted from events that careened out of control, but instead was the completion of God’s own plan for the redemption of His people through the sacrifice of His Son. It was the means by which their sins could be forgiven.

This was hard for the disciples to understand, and it is hard for us to comprehend today as well.

But the reality is the paradox that Jesus defeated death by dying. He triumphed over the grave by passing through it to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Death could not stop Him, the grave could not hold Him.

“The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene [*magg-duh-LEE-knee*] early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith [SETH] unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him. Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home.

“But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith [SETH] unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith [SETH] unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith [SETH] unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith [SETH] unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni [*ra-BOW-nye*]; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith [SETH] unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God. Mary Magdalene [*magg-duh-LEE-knee*]

came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her.

“Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith [SETH] unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he shewed [SHOWD] unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith [SETH] unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “*Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home.*”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

The victory is won. Death is conquered, evil is defeated.

While the bewildered and shaken disciples could not have comprehended how it could be so on that Sunday morning when they found an empty tomb, the sorrowful marks left there told of a powerful battle and a glorious victory won by our Lord, Jesus.

The linens left in the tomb lay empty, no longer holding a bloody and beaten body, but now they bore the evidence of a victorious body, risen and restored. They were not thrown

aside, as they might have been had the body been stolen away, but were lying on the bier still wrapped exactly as they had been wound around Christ’s body, only now they were empty, like an envelope from which the letter has been extracted. The bandage which had wrapped Jesus’ head in death was also still wrapped, only now placed to the side by itself, clearly an act of care and intent.

As the disciples would soon learn, Jesus was not dead, but alive. He had risen from the dead, breaking the bonds of death and opening the path to salvation.

Mary Magdalene [*magg-duh-LEE-knee*] and the other women had returned to the tomb before light to anoint the body of the Lord with spices and oils – fragrances for the dead. They could not do so on the Sabbath, which was Saturday, and so they waited until “the first day of the week”, that is, Sunday. Little did they know and less could they comprehend that Jesus was no longer dead, but alive, and that their spices and oils would not be needed as they normally were used to anoint a body that would lie forever in a tomb.

The stone tomb, which had been sealed by orders of Pilate, and a watch placed to guard it, could not hold Jesus, any more than death could defeat Him. The rolling of a stone across the entry to the tomb to seal it seems pathetic and childish when we consider that it was God Himself Whom the tomb was supposed to hold.

In his account, St. Luke says two angels appeared to Mary and the other women at the grave, and asked them, “*Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.*”⁷

First the clear statement that Jesus is not dead but alive: “*Why seek ye the living among the dead?*” The grave is a place