

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER
The Sunday after the Ascension¹

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 sware 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,

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 swore 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 fifth Verse of the sixteenth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John.⁶

"... But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew [SHOW] you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew [SHOW] it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, let us not be distracted by the meaningless and shallow diversions of the world. Instead, let us remain always fixed on You and Your Kingdom, remaining faithful always to Your ways. We know that the rewards of the world are of little value and last only a brief time. Let us remain always determined instead to achieve eternal reward with You. This we ask through the glorious Resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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The Rev'd Larry Wagoner, MSW⁹
April 21, 2013

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Third 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 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 St. John 16:5-end (KJV).

⁷ St. John 16:21-22 (KJV).

⁸ St. John 16:22 (KJV).

⁹ Supply Priest, Holy Angels Anglican Mission, Picayune, MS, and Christ Anglican Catholic Pro-Cathedral Church, Metairie, LA.

challenges that faced them. The reward, He said, was “joy no man taketh from you.”⁸

The travails of the current world are real. There are costs inherent in how we live our lives. But the rewards, when we stay faithful to Him and to His will for our lives, is joy beyond measure and which no one can take from us. That is the reward for remaining true.

Jesus provided the ultimate example for us in His own life and death. He remained true to the Father’s plan for achieve forgiveness and salvation for us, submitting Himself to live as one of us, then even submitting Himself to being viciously treated by men in spite of His innocence and even submitting Himself to death on the Cross.

If He can wait and persevere through the events of His Passion and death in order to achieve an end He desired for us, then we are faced with the question of whether we can wait and persevere through our lives in a manner that allows us to be with God throughout eternity. Can we remain faithful in order to remain God’s own?

That is the value of waiting through what might be tough and troubling times now in order to achieve something far greater in a time to come. Not only can the greatest joy possible be ours, but it can be beyond the ability of any man to take from us.

As we are tempted from time to time by the various offerings of the world, we need to ask ourselves the longer-term questions. We need to be mindful of the competing demands on our time, our loyalty and our lives. Will we abandon God’s plan in order to earn temporary reward from men and the world, or will we stay faithful to God’s plan regardless of the costs of doing so in terms of the world?

Can you wait until later to receive your reward?

mine, and shall shew **[SHOW]** it unto you. A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father. Then said some of his disciples among themselves, What is this that he saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is this that he saith **[SETH]**, A little while? we cannot tell what he saith **[SETH]**. Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, Do ye enquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me? Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you. And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew **[SHOW]** you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father. His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God. Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye

might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: *“A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.”*⁷ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

Are you willing to work now, perhaps even to suffer now, for a reward you will receive later? Sometimes, it is difficult for us to keep in mind a later benefit when the work or cost directly in front of us seems too large.

We may then become afraid to take on a large task, because the benefit from that task seems too remote to focus on. When we lose sight of the eventual reward for our labors, we lose motivation. This is why the old song urges that we “keep our eyes on the prize,” for only by remaining focused on the “prize”—the eventual outcome and reward—can we remain motivated and driven to achieve and to stay focused on what we must do. In the mental health fields we call this “delayed gratification”, and it is one of the measures of maturity.

Young children often cannot maintain the longer-term view and stay focused on tasks in the here and now as is required to obtain benefit in the future. For them, the future seems too remote and too unsure to be a sufficient reward. Their ability to trust that the reward will come is not able to overcome their aversion to the work needed now.

Many of our current problems in society can be traced to this type of short-sightedness. If we have a problem in a relationship, we throw away the relationship rather than investing the work to fix what is wrong and make things work. Whether a friendship, or a marriage, the response is the same. No wonder that today in this country, almost half of all marriages fail.

Indeed, the marriage that lasts beyond a few years is viewed as an oddity, and one that lasts beyond 20 years or so is rapidly becoming unheard of. The reality, that the longer-term benefit of repairing, strengthening, and reinforcing the marriage is of more value than the short-term avoidance of pain or effort, never even gets considered. Jobs are no longer a lifetime commitment, as both corporations and workers no longer feel bound by the bonds of loyalty to work together in mutual respect.

Even family, the most basic of human relationships, is under attack from without and within. Faced with the expense and work of raising a family, tens of thousands of people a year turn to the bloody expedient of abortion. They cannot fathom that the reward of a family is worth so much more in the long term than the temporary inconvenience of a birth.

In our news during this past week, as it has highlighted the murder trial of an abortion doctor in Philadelphia who is charged with slaughtering seven babies who were born alive, we have watched in horror as the realities of this quite literal holocaust are brought to light. It is often said that we live in a “throw-away society”, and it is true, but we are throwing away our selves and our own bonds to one another, and our humanity in the process.

Our Lord urges us to remain dedicated to the long-term benefits of a life with Him, despite the short-term costs and struggles that doing so will entail. He told His disciples to remain firm, despite their fears, concerns about their lives and the