

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER
The Twenty-First Sunday after Trinity¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the eighteenth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel.³

“The word of the LORD came unto me again, saying, What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord GOD, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.

“...

“Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith [SETH] the LORD: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?

“But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.

“Yet ye say, The way of the LORD is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal? When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die. Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die. Yet saith [SETH] the house of Israel, The way of the LORD is not equal. O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith [SETH] the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.

“Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith [SETH] the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.”

Or,

Here beginneth the thirty-third Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel.⁴

“Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, speak to the children of thy people, and say unto them, When I bring the sword upon a land, if the people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman: If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people; Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning; his blood shall be upon him. But he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul. But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and

Eternal God, our Heavenly Father, help us to develop patience, and the wisdom to realize those things which we do not and cannot now know. Lead us to examine in all things Your Word and Your guidance. Endue us with the humility to recognize our shortcomings and to seek always to model ourselves and our lives after Your will. This we ask in the name of Your most blessed Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

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The Rev'd Mr. Larry Wagoner, MSW¹⁴
May 6, 2012

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Mass on the Fourth Sunday after Easter, 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 44 (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 xxxviii (CIPBC 1963).

³ Ezekiel 18:1-4, 19-end (KJV).

⁴ Ezekiel 33:1-20 (KJV).

⁵ St. John 16:1-end (KJV).

⁶ St. John 16:7-12 (KJV).

⁷ St. John 16:7 (KJV).

⁸ St. John 16:7b (KJV).

⁹ St. John 7:39 (KJV).

¹⁰ St. John 16:8b (KJV).

¹¹ Acts 2:22 (KJV).

¹² St. John 16:12 (KJV).

¹³ *A Prayer of St. Chrysostom*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, WITH THE ADDITIONS AND DEVIATIONS PROPOSED IN 1928 80, 89 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 19 (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 26 (CIPBC 1963).

¹⁴ 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.

take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand.

“So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live? Say unto them, As I live, saith [SETH] the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? Therefore, thou son of man, say unto the children of thy people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression: as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness; neither shall the righteous be able to live for his righteousness in the day that he sinneth. When I shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousnesses shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it. Again, when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right; If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him: he hath done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live.

“Yet the children of thy people say, The way of the Lord is not equal: but as for them, their way is not equal. When the righteous turneth from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, he shall even die thereby. But if the wicked turn from his

wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby.

“Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. O ye house of Israel, I will judge you every one after his ways.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

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

“These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you. 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 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,

student who wants to play the advanced piece of music before thoroughly understanding the basics, we need to wait until we are ready to understand, to comprehend, to accept the things our Lord has in store for us.

In that regard, we are much like the original disciples were. We want to understand God’s plan. We want to know what will happen, what the future holds. We want to know the how, and the why, but mostly the when. But God’s messenger tells us, “*I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.*”¹²

God knows what we are ready for. More than that, He knows what is best for us. That is why in the Prayer of St. Chrysostom we pray, “*Fulfill now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of thy servants, as may be most expedient for them.*”¹³ We recognize—at least in this prayer—that we often do not know what is best for us. We ask for things that are not in our best interests. We sometimes pray foolishly, or in ignorance.

We therefore ask God to grant those things that are the best for us – as only He knows. We must come to realize that those things may not be what we ask, and may not be when or how we ask. We must – as God’s children – learn patience and trust in Him.

As in so many things in the human experience – we have to forgo our human desires for the longer-term good. In fact, the whole concept of human life on this earth as a preparation for life in eternity, of growing into people who will be with God in Heaven, is the one most immense and overwhelmingly important example of that principle that we spoke of before: that of the ability to delay gratification as a direct consequence of gaining increased maturity.

Let us pray:

tion for Christians to spread and share. Until Jesus went away, the Holy Spirit “*was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified,*” as Saint John tells us.⁹ So the Holy Spirit was to come after the Resurrection of Jesus, at the direction of the Godhead, in order to perform a three-fold mission. That mission, according to St. John, is to “*reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment*”.¹⁰

The reproof of sin is focused on those who reject Christ and His message, especially on those who hated and persecuted Him. That reproof is intended to bring change, to convince people of the need to change and to come to faith in Him, the one and only Savior of the world. The Holy Spirit is also to reprove the claims of those who claimed that Jesus was wicked, a sinner, and that He was in league with the devil. To counter these claims, Jesus notes that He is going to the Father. This He could not do if He were evil.

And, as St. Peter declared in his Pentecost sermon to the populace of Jerusalem, “*Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know...*”¹¹ In order to perform the tasks He accomplished, our Lord was clearly innocent of the charges laid against Him by the Jews. In order to achieve salvation of His people, Jesus was obviously in obedience to God’s Law. That law required death, and was fulfilled by Jesus in His own death on the Cross.

The Holy Spirit is to reprove judgment because our Lord will serve as judge of the world, of all of us, and most especially of Satan, the prince of this world. That judgment is sure, and the one salvation from that judgment is faith in the Lord.

And finally, our Lord promises us that there is far, far more for us to learn, to experience, to understand through Him. Along with that promise comes the caution that we will have to wait. Like the child waiting for Christmas, like the beginning

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: *“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not way, 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.”*⁶ In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Homily:

In the human experience, it is often the case that we must forgo our immediate natural desires in order to obtain some longer-term good. When we are young children, we must learn the virtue of patience as we learn to wait for gratification. We must also learn that we cannot have everything we want regardless of the consequences. People who work in mental health call this “learning delayed gratification”. The degree to which one has internalized this lesson is an important index of one’s overall maturity.

How many parents remember telling their children that they could have some special treat later, but not now? Every parent knows the trembling lip, tearful eyes and quavering voice of the child coming to grips with putting off what they want for the time being in order to earn a greater good later.

This is the lesson our Lord was teaching His disciples in today’s Gospel reading. As Jesus’ time on Earth neared its end, He sought to get His disciples to take the longer-term view. Jesus repeatedly told His disciples that rather than being sad because He was leaving them for a time, they needed to focus

on the far greater benefits they would see in the future: *“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.”*⁷

As hard as it was for the disciples to see beyond Jesus’ temporary absence, there was a greater benefit to them if He did go. The disciples were shaken to their core by the very idea that their Lord would leave them, even temporarily. We often share this doubt and question of the Apostles’ and we ask “Why did Jesus have to die?” It is only on more mature reflection that we remember that He died for us, to save us. From our perspective it is hard to understand why our Lord would chose to go through human death—especially the horrifyingly painful death on the Cross—for our benefit.

Our Lord was willing to undergo all this for us because He loves us. By enduring His Passion, our Lord saved us from having to undergo the wrath and vengeance of God in retribution for our sins. That is why Jesus says it is expedient for us that He goes away.

For us, it is best that He does so, even if that is not what we might want at the moment. It is by His going away—that death on the Cross—that He saved us from eternal death and destruction. It is by His dying that Jesus defeats death and the grave, and not only for Himself, but for us also.

Further, Jesus obtains for us forgiveness of our sins, reconciliation with the Father, and eternal life. Had He instead chosen to stay with His disciples on Earth rather than going to the Father, Jesus says, the results would be catastrophic for mankind: *“[F]or if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him to you.”*⁸

If our Lord had not experienced the Resurrection, then there would have been no need for the Holy Spirit to comfort, to uphold, and to teach, as there would be no good news of salva-