

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER

Quinquagesima Sunday¹

(Year II)

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the forty-first Chapter of the First Book of Moses, called Genesis.³

“And it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh **[FAY-row]** dreamed: and, behold, he stood by the river. And, behold, there came up out of the river seven well favoured kine and fatfleshed; and they fed in a meadow. And, behold, seven other kine came up after them out of the river, ill favoured and leanfleshed; and stood by the other kine upon the brink of the river. And the ill favoured and leanfleshed kine did eat up the seven well favoured and fat kine. So Pharaoh **[FAY-row]** awoke. And he slept and dreamed the second time: and, behold, seven ears of corn came up upon one stalk, rank and good. And, behold, seven thin ears and blasted with the east wind sprung up after them. And the seven thin ears devoured the seven rank and full ears. And Pharaoh **[FAY-row]** awoke, and, behold, it was a dream. And it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled; and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all the wise men thereof: and Pharaoh **[FAY-row]** told them his dream; but there was none that could interpret them unto Pharaoh **[FAY-row]**.

“Then spake the chief butler unto Pharaoh **[FAY-row]**, saying, I do remember my faults this day: Pharaoh **[FAY-row]** was wroth with his servants, and put me in ward in the captain of the guard’s house, both me and the chief baker: And we dreamed a dream in one night, I and he; we dreamed each man according to the interpretation of his dream. And there was there with us a young man, an Hebrew, servant to the captain of the guard; and we told him, and he interpreted to us our dreams; to each man according to his dream he did interpret. And it came to pass, as he interpreted to us, so it was; me he restored unto mine office, and him he hanged.

“Then Pharaoh **[FAY-row]** sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon: and he shaved

himself, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh [FAY-row]. And Pharaoh [FAY-row] said unto Joseph, I have dreamed a dream, and there is none that can interpret it: and I have heard say of thee, that thou canst understand a dream to interpret it. And Joseph answered Pharaoh [FAY-row], saying, It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh [FAY-row] an answer of peace. And Pharaoh [FAY-row] said unto Joseph, In my dream, behold, I stood upon the bank of the river: And, behold, there came up out of the river seven kine, fatfleshed and well favoured; and they fed in a meadow: And, behold, seven other kine came up after them, poor and very ill favoured and leanfleshed, such as I never saw in all the land of Egypt for badness: And the lean and the ill favoured kine did eat up the first seven fat kine: And when they had eaten them up, it could not be known that they had eaten them; but they were still ill favoured, as at the beginning. So I awoke. And I saw in my dream, and, behold, seven ears came up in one stalk, full and good: And, behold, seven ears, withered, thin, and blasted with the east wind, sprung up after them: And the thin ears devoured the seven good ears: and I told this unto the magicians; but there was none that could declare it to me.

“And Joseph said unto Pharaoh [FAY-row], The dream of Pharaoh [FAY-row] is one: God hath shewed [SHOWD] Pharaoh [FAY-row] what he is about to do. The seven good kine are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years: the dream is one. And the seven thin and ill favoured kine that came up after them are seven years; and the seven empty ears blasted with the east wind shall be seven years of famine. This is the thing which I have spoken unto Pharaoh [FAY-row]: What God is about to do he sheweth [SHOW-eth] unto Pharaoh [FAY-row]. Behold, there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt: And there shall arise after them seven years of famine; and all the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine shall consume the land; And the plenty shall not be known in the land by reason of that famine following; for it shall be very grievous. And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh [FAY-row] twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly

⁷ Galatians 3:24 (KJV).

⁸ I John 4:10, 19 (KJV).

⁹ Proverbs 12:10 (KJV).

¹⁰ St. Matthew 25:31-46 (RSV).

your neighbor, that *one* is your Lazarus, with his unpleasant and unsightly sores.

The Bible *always* personalizes it: “*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*” Thy neighbor, not mankind. “*He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen....*” His brother, not some impersonal thing called mankind. The Rich Man gave at the office, so to speak; he sent out those crumbs from his table to the beggar. But if he had known God’s love, if he had heard Moses and the Prophets, the great moral truth and the themes of redemption revealed to the children of men, if he had loved God because God first loved us, he would have brought in his brother Lazarus from the streets, and sat him at his own table.

That is the love of God when it is reflected in your heart. How can you know that love? You may begin right now, by letting God quicken your conscience, and cleanse it, all the while showing His love for as you contemplate the Cross where Jesus poured out His soul unto death for you. It is personal; the gift was given to you there. His words of forgiveness from the Cross are for you. His “*It is finished*” was the full payment and cancelation of your entire debt. You can love God because, as we see on the Cross where Jesus died, He first loved you. And therefore, you can love your brother, your neighbor, your own Lazarus.

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The Rev’d Robert Hart
June 10, 2012

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Epistle and Gospel for Holy Communion on the First Sunday after Trinity, 2012.

² *The Table of Lessons*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxiii (Anglican Church of Canada 1962).

³ Genesis 41:1-40 (KJV).

⁴ I John 4:7-end (KJV).

⁵ I John 4:8, 10-11 (KJV).

⁶ St. Luke 16:19-end.

bring it to pass. Now therefore let Pharaoh [**FAY-row**] look out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh [**FAY-row**] do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, and take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt in the seven plenteous years. And let them gather all the food of those good years that come, and lay up corn under the hand of Pharaoh [**FAY-row**], and let them keep food in the cities. And that food shall be for store to the land against the seven years of famine, which shall be in the land of Egypt; that the land perish not through the famine.

“And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh [**FAY-row**], and in the eyes of all his servants. And Pharaoh [**FAY-row**] said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is? And Pharaoh [**FAY-row**] said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed [**SHOWD**] thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fourth Chapter of the First Epistle General of St. John.⁴

“... Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “*He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.... Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.*”⁵ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

Love is the theme of this Second Lesson and that love is the love of God. It is best expressed in English with the word “charity,” and even in that we find some confusion. For the kind of charity that St. John writes about is illustrated in the negative in Our Lord’s parable of the Rich Man and the Beggar, Lazarus.⁶ The love that was lacking in that Rich Man is not that kind that merely throws a little money at something to ease the conscience, or, worse, to impress people. In that parable, the Rich Man sent food out to the beggar, Lazarus, namely crumbs that fell from his table. But he failed completely by God’s standard to love his neighbor.

from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.’ And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”¹⁰

How often has this been quoted, “*the least of these my brethren?*” Look again, and see what it really says: “*ONE OF the least of these my brethren.*” “*One of...*”, those are the missing words when this is misquoted, as it usually is. That *one* is

I am reminded always of the singular words in Commandments to love. I am going to quote an earlier sermon of my own on this same topic:

“The righteous man considers the life of his beast. But, the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel’ says the Book of Proverbs.⁹ Utopian ideologues since the French Revolution, such as Karl Marx and his followers, spoke lofty words about what was best for mankind. It reminds me of one of Charles Schultz’s *Peanuts* cartoons. Linus tells his sister Lucy that he wants to be a doctor, a *great* doctor. She tells him, ‘You cannot be a great doctor. You know why? Because a doctor must love mankind. You don’t love mankind.’ Linus, stunned, retorts ‘I do love mankind.... It’s *people* I can’t stand!’ The ideologues have always loved *mankind*; and they have made many *people* suffer for it. They have offered millions of innocent victims to some idea of “good for the highest number” and Satanic propaganda about what is best for humanity. Crowds enjoying the spectacle of heads being cut off in Paris, Communists dictating who should live, who should die, and who must go to the camps, and, indeed, the Nazis destroying millions in order to advance human evolution to the state of perfection, all believed they were lovers of mankind, saviors of that abstract and impersonal thing called ‘humanity.’”

Hear this from the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew:

“When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep

The love of which the Second Lesson speaks is personal. And it begins not with us, but with God. It begins by having your eyes opened to what God has done for you, and then only in light of your realizing how undeserving you are. You can defend yourself and plead your case; you can try to justify every sin you ever committed. That is how the Rich Man lived his life.

The ending of that parable was meant to shock us into reality. This is the only parable Jesus told that He did not compose Himself, except, that is, for the ending. It has been discovered that this was a well-known story among the Jewish people of that time, and the story always ended with Abraham saying, “*And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.*” But Jesus added His own ending:

“Then [the Rich Man] said, ‘I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send [Lazarus] to my father’s house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ Abraham saith unto him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, ‘Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.’ And he said unto him, ‘If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.’”

Indeed, like the Rich Man and his brothers, you can spend your life trying to convince yourself that you have God’s complete approval, and no need of forgiveness. Perhaps you may construct your own system of good and bad, compare yourself to people who are infinitely worse, and so feel that you are righteous enough not to need God’s mercy. But if reality

hits you, and if the truth shall make *you* free, it begins by asking if your own standard may not be true enough to take you safely into eternity. Has God spoken? Should you not hear?

In Moses and the Prophets, we find a moral law that is eternal and unchanging, those Ten Commandments and all that they really mean (which we learn in the Sermon on the Mount). We also see in Moses and the Prophets the great Messianic themes of salvation from sin and death. To prepare for eternity, we have been given quite a lot to hear. We have been given *Law and Gospel*. “*Wherfore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.*”⁷

Once you see your own need, you can appreciate the love of God. We see that salvation from sin and death was not our idea, but God’s own will. Redemption is His initiative, without any suggestion from us. “*Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.... We love him, because he first loved us.*”⁸ That love was not merely some nice and inspiring bit of sweetness and sentimentality. God saw that our need involved everything that is meant by that word “propitiation.”

It involved the pain and suffering that was born by Jesus in the death of the Cross. And even so, if you don’t hear the great moral themes and the great Messianic themes of redemption, that is, if you don’t hear Moses and the prophets, Christ’s own resurrection, with over five-hundred eyewitnesses, will never persuade you to repent. You need a soft heart that listens and hears. Then the Gospel, the Good News that He first loved us, can enter your mind and heart.

You see, this Pre-Lenten season will be followed by Lent, then by Easter, Rogationtide, Ascensiontide, and Pentecost, and then with Trinity Sunday we will celebrate that we are now in the Church that became so powerful in the Book of Acts because the Holy Spirit has come to us with His gifts and power. One can say that in Trinitytide, we turn to the second

table of the Law. The first table, that we contemplate throughout the first part of the Church Year, has four Commandments that tell us to love God. But we cannot love God, that is, we cannot love God unless and until we know that He first loved us. We celebrate that love in the Incarnation and we find that love nailed to the Cross. There He is broken, bleeding and pouring out His soul for your sins and mine.

We are forgiven without losing sight of God’s holiness, and without mistaking that forgiveness for some idea that God didn’t really care. Forgiveness is not approval. It was costly. The ninth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that redemption perfects and cleanses the human conscience. Indeed, a true understanding of the Cross of Christ gives life to your conscience. God loved you, and this is what it cost. Sin does matter, because God is holy. And sin is forgiven, because God is love. But it did not come without the death of the Cross.

So we see that to obey the first four Commandments, which are summarized by the First and Great Commandment to love God (“*with all thy heart, all thy soul and all thy mind*”), is only possible as a response; “*We love Him because He first loved us.*” And then, after celebrating through Pentecost the great acts of God’s love in Jesus His Son that move us to love Him, with Trinity Sunday we will turn to the second table of the Law, the six Commandments that are summarized in the words, “*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*”

At the beginning it is personal. “*Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another....*” And so it goes on: “*We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar: for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loves God love his brother also.*”