

The commission Jesus gave to His disciples is still active and it falls on us. It is now our job to continue to spread the faith to the whole world. We celebrate this season Jesus' Ascension into Heaven. He was taken up into the clouds, and the disciples could only stand staring up into those clouds. The angels there told them that Jesus would return the same way He left them. But in the meantime, there is work to do.

Jesus did His work. Now it is our turn.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, as Thou commanded us, we now work to spread Your Gospel in the world. Grant to us the strength, the grace and the wisdom to carry the Good News of the Gospel to each and every person, bringing them each to You and Your Kingdom. Give to us the words and the dedication to always seek to bring Your light to others. Let that light shine forth in our lives to Your glory. This we ask in Your most blessed name. Amen.

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¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Mass on Ascension Day, 2012.

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

³ I Samuel 9:1—10:1 (KJV).

⁴ Acts 1:1-14 (KJV).

⁵ Acts 1:8-11 (KJV).

⁶ Judges 2:13 (KJV).

⁷ St. John 4:9 (KJV).

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SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER

The First Sunday after Trinity¹

(Year I)

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the ninth Chapter of the First Book of Samuel, otherwise called the First Book of the Kings.³

“Now there was a man of Benjamin, whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel [**uh-BUY-ell**], the son of Zeror [**ZEE-rawr**], the son of Bechorath [**bee-KOH-rath**], the son of Aphiah [**uh-FIE-uh**], a Benjamite, a mighty man of power. And he had a son, whose name was Saul, a choice young man, and a goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people. And the asses of Kish Saul's father were lost. And Kish said to Saul his son, Take now one of the servants with thee, and arise, go seek the asses. And he passed through mount Ephraim [**EE-frih-eem**], and passed through the land of Shalisha [**SHALL-uh-shah**], but they found them not: then they passed through the land of Shalim [**SHAY-limb**], and there they were not: and he passed through the land of the Benjamites, but they found them not. And when they were come to the land of Zuph [**ZUFF**], Saul said to his servant that was with him, Come, and let us return; lest my father leave caring for the asses, and take thought for us. And he said unto him, Behold now, there is in this city a man of God, and he is an honourable man; all that he saith cometh surely to pass: now let us go thither; peradventure he can shew [**SHOW**] us our way that we should go. Then said Saul to his servant, But, behold, if we go, what shall we bring the man? for the bread is spent in our vessels, and there is not a present to bring to the man of God: what have we? And the servant answered Saul again, and said, Behold, I have here at hand the fourth part of a shekel of silver: that will I give to the man of God, to tell us our way. (Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, thus he spake, Come, and let us go to the seer: for he that is now

called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer.) Then said Saul to his servant, Well said; come, let us go. So they went unto the city where the man of God was.

“And as they went up the hill to the city, they found young maidens going out to draw water, and said unto them, Is the seer here? And they answered them, and said, He is; behold, he is before you: make haste now, for he came to day to the city; for there is a sacrifice of the people to day in the high place: As soon as ye be come into the city, ye shall straightway find him, before he go up to the high place to eat: for the people will not eat until he come, because he doth bless the sacrifice; and afterwards they eat that be bidden. Now therefore get you up; for about this time ye shall find him. And they went up into the city: and when they were come into the city, behold, Samuel came out against them, for to go up to the high place.

“Now the LORD had told Samuel in his ear a day before Saul came, saying, To morrow about this time I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be captain over my people Israel, that he may save my people out of the hand of the Philistines: for I have looked upon my people, because their cry is come unto me. And when Samuel saw Saul, the LORD said unto him, Behold the man whom I spake to thee of! this same shall reign over my people. Then Saul drew near to Samuel in the gate, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, where the seer’s house is. And Samuel answered Saul, and said, I am the seer: go up before me unto the high place; for ye shall eat with me to day, and to morrow I will let thee go, and will tell thee all that is in thine heart. And as for thine asses that were lost three days ago, set not thy mind on them; for they are found. And on whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on all thy father’s house? And Saul answered and said, Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me? And Samuel took Saul and his servant, and brought them into the parlour, and made them sit in the chiefest place among them that were bidden, which were about thirty persons. And Samuel said unto the cook, Bring the portion which I gave thee, of which I said

earth.” At the time of Jesus the known world was a smallish place. Roman geographer Pomponius Mela, who lived around the same time as Jesus, divided the world known at the time into five zones, of which he said only two were habitable. The known world was mostly limited to the area around the Mediterranean, plus northern Africa and parts of Europe. Yet, Jesus was saying His disciples would be sent to the “*uttermost part of the earth.*”

This was the challenge; He was saying, in effect: “You will go anywhere and everywhere. You will spread my word to the entire world. You will go to places and people where you will be hated, despised and reviled – and you may face violence.” If we consider the magnitude of the challenge, it is daunting to say the least.

Imagine your reaction if you were told the same thing. Could you do it? Could you conquer your fear, your anxiety? Not without God’s help. “*But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.*” That help was coming. The Day of Pentecost was coming, when the Holy Spirit would come upon the Apostles and give to them the power, the inspiration, the courage and the drive to carry out Jesus’ charge to them.

With that help, that power and support, the Apostles could do what they had been asked to do. They could carry the Gospel message to not only the Jews of Jerusalem, but also to all of Judea. They could travel beyond Galilee and the Jordan River to plant new congregations, to establish new congregations. They could teach, convert and support the growth of the beginnings of the Church. Even into Samaria they could go, where they would convert many. They could even go to the uttermost parts of the Earth. That is what we do. In Jesus’ day, no one had ever heard of Picayune, Mississippi, where we stand today. No Christian had ever seen the Boley Creek or the Pearl River.

nesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

Consider what that meant. In Jerusalem and Judea, followers of Christ were persecuted bitterly by the Jewish hierarchy. Just as the leaders of the power structure of the Jews feared and hated Jesus Christ, they also hated His followers and were doing their best to search them out and destroy them. But here was Jesus Himself ordering that some of His disciples stay and be witnesses to His works, His power, and His deity. They would indeed “take up the Cross” and follow Him.

Some were being sent to Samaria. Because the disciples were seen as Jews, they would be ostracized and hated in Samaria as well. There was long-standing enmity between the Samaritans and the Jews, despite their living in relative proximity to each other. The Samaritans had remained behind in the Northern Kingdom when most of Israel was carried off into exile in Assyria. The forms of Judaism professed by the two peoples diverged during this period and those who had remained behind intermarried with, and were sometimes influenced by, the new populations the Babylonians moved in to replace the departed Jews. For example, as it says in the book of Judges: *“And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth.”*⁶ The long-standing conflicts and distrust between the two people made violence quite possible.

Remember how shocked the Samaritan woman was when Jesus spoke to her at Jacob’s Well? *“Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.”*⁷ While our Lord did not reject the woman, and even revealed Himself to her as the Christ, it was quite reasonable of the Apostles to fear this mission to Samaria.

But there was more. Jesus also commanded His followers to bring the Gospel news *“unto the uttermost part of the*

unto thee, Set it by thee. And the cook took up the shoulder, and that which was upon it, and set it before Saul. And Samuel said, Behold that which is left! set it before thee, and eat: for unto this time hath it been kept for thee since I said, I have invited the people. So Saul did eat with Samuel that day.

“And when they were come down from the high place into the city, Samuel communed with Saul upon the top of the house. And they arose early: and it came to pass about the spring of the day, that Samuel called Saul to the top of the house, saying, Up, that I may send thee away. And Saul arose, and they went out both of them, he and Samuel, abroad. And as they were going down to the end of the city, Samuel said to Saul, Bid the servant pass on before us, (and he passed on,) but stand thou still a while, that I may shew thee the word of God.

“Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the LORD hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance?

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the first Chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.⁴

“The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: To whom also he shewed [SHOWD] himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Fa-

ther hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus [*al-FEE-uss*], and Simon Zelotes [*zih-LOW-tease*], and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: "*But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*"⁵ In the Na~~x~~me of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Homily:

Jesus did His work. Now it is our turn.

All Christians are charged with sharing the Gospel news. The disciples who were present as Jesus ascended into heaven Forty Days after the Resurrection were given their orders, orders which fall on all of us who call ourselves Christian.

The disciples had been on quite a roller-coaster ride of emotions and now they were given the greatest challenge in their lives. They went in the span of about six weeks from the triumphant entry into Jerusalem, to the trial of Jesus Christ and the agony of His Crucifixion, then up again as He rose from the dead only three days later, only to tell them He was leaving again.

St. Paul relates to us that even after our Lord's ministry, and His passion, and even during the Forty Days during which He appeared to them after the Resurrection and explained things they could not have understood until they had experienced His death, the Apostles still had many questions: "*When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?*"

But our Lord redirected them yet again to His mission and, therefore, to theirs: "*It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.*" "*But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you,*" Jesus tells them. You don't need to know the times, nor the places, nor the ways that the Father will act. You have your own tasks to complete. And you will receive the power to accomplish those tasks.

In a foreshadowing reminiscent of the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Apostles are told that the power they need for their task will come to them as they are touched by the Holy Ghost. And what is that task? "*Ye shall be wit-*