

Sermon for Morning Prayer
Trinity XIX

Lessons:

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-fourth Chapter of the Book of Job.¹

“Why, seeing times are not hidden from the Almighty, do they that know him not see his days? Some remove the landmarks; they violently take away flocks, and feed thereof. They drive away the ass of the fatherless, they take the widow’s ox for a pledge. They turn the needy out of the way: the poor of the earth hide themselves together. Behold, as wild asses in the desert, go they forth to their work; rising betimes for a prey: the wilderness yieldeth food for them and for their children. They reap every one his corn in the field: and they gather the vintage of the wicked. They cause the naked to lodge without clothing, that they have no covering in the cold. They are wet with the showers of the mountains, and embrace the rock for want of a shelter. They pluck the fatherless from the breast, and take a pledge of the poor. They cause him to go naked without clothing, and they take away the sheaf from the hungry; Which make oil within their walls, and tread their wine presses, and suffer thirst. Men groan from out of the city, and the soul of the wounded crieth out: yet God layeth not folly to them. They are of those that rebel against the light; they know not the ways thereof, nor abide in the paths thereof. The murderer rising with the light killeth the poor and needy, and in the night is as a thief. The eye also of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, saying, No eye shall see me: and disguiseth his face. In the dark they dig through houses, which they had marked for themselves in the daytime: they know not the light. For the morning is to them even as the shadow of death: if one know them, they are in the terrors of the shadow of death.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the second Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to Titus.

“But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded. In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you. Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again; Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live

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¹ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxvi (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² Titus 2: 11-12 (KJV).

³ The word “grace” comes from the Latin “*gratia*”, which itself means “gift”. Thus God’s Grace is, quite literally, “that which is given to us by God”.

⁴ Subject always to the condition precedent that we have been baptized, for Baptism is the Sacrament that confers “Sacramental Capacity”, *i.e.*, the ability to appropriate to our benefit the Graces that are present in the other Sacraments. Cf. Article XXVII *Of Baptism*, THE ARTICLES OF RELIGION, found in THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 608 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Titus 2: 1 & 7-8 (KJV).

⁷ Titus 2: 11-14 (KJV).

⁸ St. Luke 12: 48b (KJV).

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hope that they do not know, then they may come to understand that these invaluable gifts are purely the results of God's "Gratia", His "Gift", His Grace.

The role played by what the Elizabethans called our "conversation", our manner of living, in commanding Christianity to those who know not Christ, is beautifully expressed in a prayer written by our late Archbishop Michael Dean Stephens, which he was wont to use as a "choir prayer" at the end of the Eucharist:

"Go with us, O heavenly Father, into the world. Mold us, make us, and shape us into the image of Christ, That men may take notice that we have been with Jesus, And so join with us in thy house to praise His holy Name, Who died and rose again for us, thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

Conclusion:

This is the glory and the burden of being a Christian. Christ makes it possible for us to overcome our innate weaknesses of character, so as to live up to the vocation of sanctified people that He has bestowed on us. That very possibility, however, carries with it not only the simultaneous obligation to struggle constantly to fulfill that calling but it also carries with it a distinct spiritual peril if we make no effort to do so.

"For unto whomever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."⁸ So, too, it is with God: the more He gives us, the more He asks of us, particularly of how we live the lives that were dedicated to Him in our Baptisms.

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soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world...."² In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction:

One of the most misunderstood concepts in Christianity is the one that goes by the infelicitous name of "original sin". Contrary to most people's impressions, it does not mean that we come into this world imbued with sin, it merely means – and this is quite enough for us to bear – we come into this world with an inborn tendency to sin. That is, we seem to be driven to do those very things that God would have us refrain from doing, the things that tend to separate us from Him and from all that He would like to do for us.

G. K. Chesterton once said that original sin is the only doctrine of the Christian Faith that can be verified empirically: we have only to look about us at the way human beings actually behave.

Theme:

Even though we have this inborn predisposition to sin, that is, to separate ourselves from God by our own acts, God has provided us with a remedy for that. His Grace is able to give us the strength of will to overcome our native propensity to sin, if only we will allow it to do so. That Grace is freely available to us, as God's unmerited gift to us.³

Development:

1. St. Paul tells St. Titus that Christians are to live so that their lives are examples of Christian virtue and teaching.

To say that God's strengthening Grace is His free gift to us, always available when we need it,⁴ is not to say that it does not come at some cost to us or that it does not impose some burdens upon us. To the contrary, the process of Baptism, by which we "rightly are grafted into the Church",⁵ not only gives us the power to withstand the temptations to which we are subject, but it places us under the obligation so to do.

As St. Paul reminded St. Titus:

"But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine... In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you."⁶

There are two reasons that we are thus enjoined to utilize that strengthening Grace to enable us to conform our manner of living to God's desires. One looks inward into the community of the Church, so we may say it has a pastoral orientation. The other looks outward to the world, so we may say it has an evangelistic or apologetic orientation.

2. We are enjoined to live righteously in order to build up the Body of Christ, the Church.

The inward-looking, or pastoral, reason for trying to build lives of Grace is that by doing so we show God we are truly appreciative of His efforts to save us. In addition to that individual or personal aspect, however, at the same time that we improve our own Christian lives, we thereby build up the Church as a spiritual community.

Not only does our Grace-enabled amendment of our own lives contribute directly to the quality of the Church's

corporate life, but we also thereby teach other Christians by our example. So St. Paul told St. Titus:

"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."⁷

That is our ultimate purpose in struggling to live righteously, which we cannot attain by our own personal efforts. Our strongest reason for seeking God's Grace to live righteously is that we look for the "Second Coming", for the Judgments, for salvation, and, if we are successful in withstanding the scrutiny of those Judgments, to an eternity of living in fellowship with God.

3. Our living lives of personal righteousness is the only response we can make to outsiders' charges of hypocrisy within the Church and is also the only argument that will ultimately convince many of them that they, too, need Jesus Christ and need to live in His Church.

The outward-looking, or evangelistic and apologetic, reason for trying to build lives of Grace is that the world outside judges the validity of the Christian message by what it sees of that message's transforming power. And, of course, the only evidence it has of that power to change lives is what it sees has happened in the lives of other people, such as we, who are just like all the others out in that world save that we who are identified as Christians have come to know Jesus.

In all other ways, we are just as they are. So if our lives show evidences of a peace, a joy, a love, a security, a