

SERMON FOR LAYREADERS

THE ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Brian McKee¹

First Lesson:²

Here beginneth the twelfth Verse of the twenty-sixth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.³
Isaiah 26:12-16, 19

“LORD, thou wilt ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us. O LORD our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name. They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise: therefore hast thou visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish. Thou hast increased the nation, O LORD, thou hast increased the nation: thou art glorified: thou hadst removed it far unto all the ends of the earth. LORD, in trouble have they visited thee, they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them. . . . Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

Second Lesson:⁴

Here beginneth the twenty-sixth Verse of the eighth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Romans.⁵
Romans 8:26-39

“. . . Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings

which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.”⁶

unto everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on Him in thy heart by faith with thanksgiving.”

Susannah Wesley wrote that on that day, she truly heard those words in a new way. She realized that none of us, on our own, can ever earn salvation. Only the Grace given to us by Christ can save us. That Body of Christ that we are given at the communion rail, and the prevenient Grace of God, preserves our bodies and souls unto everlasting life.

Let us pray:

ALMIGHTY and all-loving God, giver of prevenient Grace to all of us unworthy sinners: enable us to choose to trust in Thy grace for our salvation; allow us to place our full trust in Thee; help us to believe that all things work together for good for those of us who love God and are called by Grace; enable us to be freed from the “spirit of bondage” that can prevent us from trusting fully in Thy saving grace. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

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² *Psalms and Lessons for the Church Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxx (PECUSA 1928/1943).

³ Isaiah 26:12-16, 19 (KJV).

⁴ *Psalms and Lessons for the Church Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxx (PECUSA 1928/1943).

⁵ Romans 8:26-39 (KJV).

⁶ Romans 8:28 (KJV).

Homily:

Sometimes it just seems like we have hit rock bottom in our lives. All the pressures of the world are closing in on us. We live in a day of great distress in our country, and in the world. Terrorism, war, rumors of wars, starvation, the threat of flu epidemics and pandemics, political corruption, and a host of other things make it seem like the world is just falling apart, and we with it.

On a personal level, many people are undergoing emotionally devastating and physically devastating times. Things like the loss of a job in our struggling economy, facing a mortgage foreclosure and loss of a home, terrible diseases like cancer, the death of a loved one, harassment at one’s job, and a host of other such things can really bring our hearts to the breaking point.

Many years ago, I faced a really devastating crisis in my life. I was really down emotionally, and depressed. The only thing I was sure of was my belief and trust in God. I kept praying and asking God’s help but I expected the help to come on my time schedule -- right now -- instead of waiting for God’s time schedule, which is the best time schedule. However, at the time we are in a crisis, it can be hard to see that far ahead.

One day, a Christian friend said to me on the telephone, “The answer is in Romans 8:28. Sit down, take out your Bible, and read that verse over and over again, several times a day, if that is what it takes to keep yourself from fear and worry.”

The verse read “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose.”

I read that verse over and over until I memorized it, and in the months that followed, I kept praying, and quoting that verse to myself, and quoting it in my prayers. And in about nine months, everything began to work out. Indeed, my life since that crisis has been filled with more hope and joy than ever before. Because of that crisis, my life changed greatly for the better. My friends tell me that they can see an increase in my devotion to God.

What truly changed my life for the better, was that the crisis, caused me to be released from the “spirit of bondage” that was keeping me from truly giving control of my life to God. The situation brought me low enough in spirit that I knew I could not solve the problem by myself. I learned through the crisis to believe Romans 8:28. And in so believing, I realized that it was the prevenient grace of God that saves us from sin. I also realized that it was only through trusting in God’s grace that we can truly live our lives without fear.

The Rev. John Wesley, an Anglican priest and theologian, who lived from 1703-1791, spoke often of what he called a “spirit of bondage” that can distract us from God’s Grace. Wesley taught that this “spirit of bondage” takes two forms.

Wesley taught that we are born into a “natural bondage”, a condition in which our spiritual senses are not awake. We may be in a deep spiritual slumber, performing righteous actions and worshiping in the church, but yet we are not really awake to the sins in our lives. When our senses are really awake, we are now aware of sin’s control over us, but then we risk the second type of bondage.

Wesley taught that the second type is a “legal bondage”, a condition in which we become fearfully preoccupied with the gulf between God’s laws and the state of our

soul. We are bound by an anguish that we can never truly free ourselves from the sin in our lives.

The true answer to our personal problems, and the way to stop worrying about the problems of the world we cannot change, is found later in today’s Second Lesson, from Romans, chapter 8: “It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us . . . in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

We can be freed from the “spirit of bondage”. We can know that we are truly Christian, and that nothing can separate us from the love of God. The reason is Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross, Christ’s miraculous resurrection from the dead, and the prevenient grace that Christ offers to all of us.

Susannah Wesley, mother of The Rev. John Wesley, was the wife of The Rev. Samuel Wesley, rector of the Anglican parish of St. Andrew’s, at Epworth, England. She was a devout Christian woman and a dedicated teacher to her children of the Christian faith. Yet, throughout her life, she was troubled by the “spirit of bondage”. She was troubled if she were really living a life of righteousness. She was constantly in fear that she did not live up to God’s laws. She was bound by a spirit of “legal bondage”.

Susannah Wesley wrote in her journal that one day, while kneeling at the communion rail in St. Andrew’s parish church, she listened to the words the Rector said while handing her the Body of Christ: “The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul