

**SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
ST. MARK'S DAY (APRIL 25)**

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Priest Associate

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the sixth Verse of the sixty-second Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.²

“... I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence, And give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth. The LORD hath sworn by his right hand, and by the arm of his strength, Surely I will no more give thy corn to be meat for thine enemies; and the sons of the stranger shall not drink thy wine, for the which thou has laboured: But they that have gathered it shall eat it, and praise the LORD; and they that have brought it together shall drink it in the courts of my holiness.

“Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people. Behold, the LORD hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. And they shall call them, The holy people, The redeemed of the LORD: and thou shalt be called, Sought out, A city not forsaken.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fourth Verse of the fifteenth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Romans.³

“... For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. Now the God of patience and con-

solation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God. Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name. And again he saith [SETH], Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people. And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people. And again, Esaias [ee-ZYE-uss] saith [SETH], There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust. Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”⁴ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

The Prayer Book anticipates that a shortened version of Morning Prayer will precede the communion service, and when it does not, we are left with only New Testament readings. The problem with that is that an appreciation of Old Testament theology is essential to understanding the New Testament.

The price of neglecting the Old Testament becomes quite apparent during Advent, because it is in those Scriptures that the groundwork is laid for the coming of Christ. So St. Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, writes, “Whatsoever things were written

¹ *Psalms and Lessons for the Fixed Holy Days*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xlv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² Isaiah 62:6-end (KJV).

³ Romans 15:4-13 (KJV).

⁴ Romans 15:4 (KJV).

aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." The scriptures referred to are clearly those of the Old Testament.

In the famous interview with Nicodemus, Jesus is appalled at the ignorance of basic Jewish theology that Nicodemus displays. "Are you a teacher of Israel," he says, "and yet you do not know these things?" Again and again Jesus tells His opponents that they do not accept His claims because they do not understand their own scriptures. "You search the scriptures," He says, "because you believe that in them you have eternal life, but it is they that testify of me."

I do not propose to offer you a complete course in Old Testament theology in one sermon. I will just touch on two essential points and a few of the Christian beliefs that grow out of them. I will also point out that the denial of those essential points is a major reason that the world as a whole is unable to grasp the monumental importance of the Gospel. This will not be an easy sermon to follow, but I will attempt to lead you step by step.

Perhaps the most important concept that emerges from the Old Testament is the doctrine of creation. What that doctrine says is that the primary reality in the universe is spirit. Matter derives from spirit, and not the other way around. Material things have no meaning in themselves. They derive their meaning from the purposes for which they are used.

In our society the behaviorists trace the roots of our values, our morals, and our emotions to various chemical and electrical sources in our brains. In a more subtle way, advertisers attempt to sell vitality, self confidence, and status by selling you a car. Others offer masculinity or femininity by way of an after-shave lotion or a shampoo. The government attacks every problem by appropriating money, as if that would produce morality and dignity and beauty and truth and all the other spiritual values that we desire. All of this is a denial of the Biblical doctrine of creation. That doctrine, which is firmly rooted in the Old Testament, provides the

basis for sacramental theology and for the doctrine of the Incarnation on which the Sacraments are based.

Now if you are ready to accept the subordination of the material to the spiritual, you are ready for the next great concept, which is that all spiritual reality derives from a single center, and that single center is not an impersonal force but a personal God with intelligence and will.

There are lesser spiritual beings who derive their existence from this one great spiritual center. These spiritual entities have wills of their own and some of them exercise their wills in opposition to the will of God. People are among those entities because people are spiritual beings who inhabit and function through material bodies. When people oppose their will to the will of God, we call that sin, and sin causes a disruption of the order of the universe. That order depends on obedience to the will of God, and when that will is opposed a note of discord is introduced.

There is an attempt in some portions of Scripture to limit the results of sin to the life of each individual sinner. People today still ask what they have done to deserve the suffering that is sometimes thrust upon them. But the exact correspondence between sin and suffering in the life of any given man or woman had to be rejected and ultimately was rejected because that's not how the universe is constructed. The creation is so interdependent that what happens in one area affects everything else. That is a Biblical concept that modern chaos theory seems to confirm. The whole affects each part and each part affects the whole. That concept laid the groundwork for the development of the Christian doctrine of the Atonement.

St. Paul says, "As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one man's obedience many will be made righteous." The interdependence of creation works both ways. One man, acting in opposition to God's will, affects the life of everyone for evil, but one man, acting in accord with God's will, af-

fects the life of everyone for good. Order is disrupted by rebellion but restored by conformity to the will of the Creator.

Since human flesh was the vehicle that was used by a rebellious spirit to disrupt the order of creation, so human flesh was used as vehicle to restore that order. That is why God entered into the creation in the person of Jesus Christ.

The process of restoration is not yet complete, but it was set in motion by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the end result is inevitable. "As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive."

Conclusion:

During Advent, we prepare to celebrate the turning point of history. St John says of Jesus, "All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made." But even the Creator did not enter the material world without the willing subordination of one woman's will to the will of God. So Mary is called the second Eve, because it was her obedience that opened the way for the undoing of the consequences of the first Eve's disobedience. For that, she is honored above all women, and properly so. But none of that makes any sense without the teaching of the Old Testament as background.

There are other concepts such as male headship and a linear concept of time that have developed out of Jewish ways of understanding the world. That is why Christians and Jews often find themselves on the same side of the culture wars that are going on throughout the world. It is also why we need to pay attention to the Old Testament if we hope to understand the New.

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