

Sermon for Morning Prayer The Fourth Sunday after Easter Lessons:

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-first Verse of the nineteenth Chapter of the Book of Job.2

“...

Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me. Why do ye persecute me as God, and are not satisfied with my flesh? Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock forever! For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; [though my reins be consumed within me.]” Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the forty-fourth Verse of the twelfth Chapter of the Gospel

According to St. John.3

“Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.” Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text: From the First Lesson: “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God....”⁴ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Introduction: In today's First Lesson, out of the midst of Job's extremity, he expresses in ringing terms his confidence that in the end God will deal justly with him: "O that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! Oh, that with an iron pen and lead they were graven in the rock forever! For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then from my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another."5

Some commentators would have us believe that by these words Job was in no way asserting his belief in the Messiah, or in the Resurrection, but instead was merely hoping for a "vindicator" who would revenge him under the *lex talionis*. To me, that seems a very strained interpretation when compared with the clear meaning of his words. Why would not Job, who was specially blessed by the Lord as the most faithful among God's servants, have been rewarded with the revelation of truths that were yet to come to most of his contemporaries?

Christians read the Old Testament with eyes that have been opened by the New Testament. That is, we always look at the history of God's dealings with humanity from the perspective of His incarnate revelation of Himself that is the essential theme of the New Testament story. Thus, too, for us it seems perfectly natural that Job in his extremity would have looked forward to the coming of that Redeemer who in his time was yet to come but who, from our present perspective, has already come.

One of the key elements of this New Testament view of history is that, by the resurrected Jesus' calling us to Him as His people, He has given us the power to overcome death. In fact, He has given us the power to overcome death in both its forms: the physical death of the body that is caused by disease, accident, or wounds, and the spiritual death of the soul that is caused by sin.

Today's Second Lesson is, essentially, a summary of the main themes of Jesus' public message. According to St. John's account, after this discussion, Jesus withdrew with the inner circle of His followers to the upper room for the Last Supper and His final teachings to that inner circle. In this

summary of His ministry, Jesus tells us that He is the way through which we come to God the Father. As Jesus says to His followers, “[H]e that seeth me seeth him that sent me.” St. Paul affirms this: “He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation” and “He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high....”

The “glory of God” that Paul says Jesus reflects is the shekinah, the brightness so intense that human eyes cannot stand it, which is the sign of the actual presence of God. Thus this shining “glory” was so overwhelming that it made Moses glisten when he came down from speaking with God on Mount Sinai, it lit up Solomon’s Temple when God came down to take up residence in Jerusalem, and it struck Saul blind on the road to Damascus. It is this shining “glory” to which St. Paul attests that verifies Our Lord’s assertion that “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh to the Father, but by me.”

This Jesus, Who is the way to knowledge of God the Father, brings us out of the darkness of sin and death and into the bold light of forgiveness and eternal life. As Our Lord tells us in today’s Second Lesson, “I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.” This “light” is a reference to the shekinah “glory”, that is, to the presence of God which Christ Himself is and brings to us.

In this country, there are few remaining areas that do not have electricity and where, therefore, streetlights and floodlights almost everywhere make walking at night relatively easy and safe. But anyone who as ever stayed in those few remaining places without electricity, and perhaps has had to walk a dark path through the backyard at night to find primitive facilities, understands why this “light” to which Our Lord refers is also powerful a metaphor for finding one’s way. A person walking after nightfall needs a light to keep from tripping, stumbling, or walking off the path. Thus Christ tells His followers, “Ye are the light of the world,” to indicate that we are to bring “enlightenment” in the form of

knowledge of Him to the entire world. Thus St. Luke calls Him “A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory” – or shekinah – “the glory of thy people Israel.”

And as St. John puts it in his own inimitable words, “In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.” For those who will use the light Jesus brings us, and so will walk in His way, He will guide us safely to knowledge and love of God and so to ultimate fellowship with God. As Jesus says, “If any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.”

It has been pointed out that those who choose not to follow Jesus have actually judged themselves. They have chosen not to pursue a close, intimate relationship both with God the Son and, through that Son, with God the Father. So it may be that the final Judgment of which we are assured will not consist of Our Lord’s passing a sort of sentence upon us. Instead, it may merely consist of His ratifying the sentence we have already passed upon ourselves. If we have made ourselves into the sort of persons who do not wish to spend eternity in fellowship with God, He may simply give us our wish.

However, for those of us who do choose to spend eternity with God, Jesus offers us the means to that relationship. And we may trust in the efficacy of those means, because they come directly from God the Father and are given to us upon the authority of God the Father. So Jesus tells us, “I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting...”

Traditionally, the Church has reminded us that there are four “Last Things”, that is, things that come at the end of, in fact that terminate, our lives here on earth. These “Four Last Things” are Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell. Each of us will experience three of these four. We will all die and we will all stand before Our Lord in judgment. Then those of us who withstand that scrutiny will experience Heaven, while those of us who fail that scrutiny will experience Hell. Three of these four things are inevitable; the only question is which of the final two any one person will experience. Thus it behooves

each of us to keep these ever before us. Daily, we should remind ourselves of their reality. Daily, we should remind ourselves of which one of the final two we wish to be our own destination. Daily, we should reflect on how Christ has made it possible for each of us to reach that preferred destination rather than the other one. Daily, we should renew our commitment to follow Him there by following His commandments to us.

The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister 22 May 10, 2009