

Trinity XIX – 15 October 2023

“That ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind...”

+In the Name of the Father and of the Son...

Were you exhausted after the last of the lessons were read this morning? It can be very easy to take Scripture lessons in isolation from one another when we hear them in church. “Here endeth the Lesson,” we say when one portion finishes and “here beginneth” as we start the next portion. This even sounds as if they have nothing to do with one another. Indeed sometimes it seems as if they do not, as if those in charge of the lectionary merely chose their favorite lessons from the Epistles and from the Gospel, without any regard to what they had to do with one another. This morning I’m not sure they do that so much as play with our human emotions. Speaking of emotions, recently in Morning Prayer we have had our Old Testament lessons taken from the book of Job. Poor Job. We can’t help but feel sorry for him. Here is a man who had served God and been faithful for all of his life, and truly

woke up one day to have it all whisked away from him. Not only did he lose almost all that he had, but his friends and even his wife ridiculed him for his continued faith in God. Now I don't know about you, but on occasions when all the world has seemingly gone mad I know I can always count on my wife. Not that she doesn't disagree with me from time to time, and let me know it, but she does not dress me down and tell me what a stupid person I am and that I need to get a dose of reality. Job endures this and continues to trust in God, hence the oft-quoted term "the patience of Job". True, there was the short time toward the end of the book where Job questions how God sometimes chooses to do things. God quickly put Job in his proper place asking who he was to criticize: "Where were you when I created the world?" In other words, "I designed and put this world in order. Don't you think I might know just a little bit more about how it works and ought to run than you do?"

But don't we see just a little bit of ourselves in Job's logic? Can't we see ourselves thinking the same thoughts to ourselves: "Here I am

faithful day after day, year after year, and where does it get me? Where has it gotten me? Just look at my neighbor, brother, co-worker, whoever. That person is a lying, cheating, stealing [fill in the sin or short-coming of your choice here – the exact failure is immaterial] no good so-and-so, but look at how he has succeeded in life?” Let’s look at Job’s list of complaints about these folks: in general, the wicked love darkness and yet go unpunished. Specifically, they remove markers. What does that mean? They change the boundary markers of land, claiming land that is not rightfully theirs as their own. That’s right, stealing. What’s more, they steal sheep and goats, probably some on the land that they stole, and they cheated widows and orphans. Cheating orphans, people who don’t have one of the most basic building blocks of Western society, a loving family. Likewise, when we compare ourselves to others, we have a laundry list of complains about them. Somewhat updated perhaps. I, for instance, have never raised any sheep or goats, so consequently have never been a victim of a barnyard thief. But your imagination can do the necessary updating for you. Where we must be careful though, is

not in the seriousness of the infraction committed by our neighbor, but in the contents and motivation of our hearts. Are we operating with righteous indignation like Our Lord when He threw the money changers out of the temple, or are we more like the publican in the 18th chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke? Do you remember him? He was the one who thanked God that he was not like other men who were robbers and adulterers, but he tithed and fasted. In short, “Aren’t I wonderful? God, do you realize how lucky you are to have *me*?” It’s not that fasting and tithing are bad. In fact, fasting and alms-giving were not just suggestions in the Early Church, but expected of the believers. And in this case when I say “Early Church”, I mean when Our Lord was walking the earth, when Holy Mother Church was still in Her infancy. But the state of the Pharisee’s heart was bad. This is so important that your clergymen (and anyone else who prays the daily offices) prays twice a day, “O God, make clean our hearts within us. And take not thy Holy Spirit from us.”

So in case we thought we were going to get a nice pat on the back for leading such a life without reproach, St. Paul humbles us in the Epistle read this morning just as surely as God did Job. “Walk not,” he tells, “as other gentiles walk, *in the vanity of their mind*. Isn’t that wonderful imagery? The vanity of their mind. Sure I like my own mind, I am always proven right there and none of my ideas are ever found wanting. Last week I took a vote on every idea and plan I had, and they all came out unanimously in my favor! *{Pause.}* This is due to our understanding being darkened, but the worse result is that we are alienated from the life of God. Now I am the first one to admit that the term “open-mindedness” is overused. I personally think (now, this is not necessarily the view of the Church here), that it is thrown out there merely as a way to shut down an argument, especially when the accuser is not winning on the merits. No one wants to be called close-minded, so the insult is hurled with the intent that the accusation itself will distract from the debate at hand enough for a default judgment of sorts. Sadly, we see this tactic as much in the Church as in politics. That

being said, if we are truly so close-minded, so cemented in our ways that not even God can get through to us, then we need to reexamine our priorities. We need to cast off that corrupt old man, and replace him with the new man. The emphasis here is that what we must become is so different than what we were when we were born, that it is a new creation. Our Church Kalendar emphasizes this thinking too. After Trinity Sunday in early summer, we have Sunday after Sunday of the church building decorated in the liturgical color of green, save a couple of exceptions, until we arrive at Advent in late November or early December. This green represents the growth of our lives in Christ as we read the teachings of Christ presented in the lectionary of the long Trinity season.

The good news is that we are not the only ones to walk this way. At first I might feel a little personally injured at this apparent lack of appreciation of my good efforts, but then I go back to the context of Job. If Job, who by all accounts was a saint, even though he lived before the time of Christ and so can't be one, at least in the technical sense. If

Job, who was practically perfect, and yet still had trouble with this issue and has to cast off the old man in favor of the new, then I should be all too happy to be required to do the same as opposed to something much worse.

May we like Job, that great forerunner in the Faith, approach our trials with the utmost patience. Rather than being quick to judge our neighbors, let us live out our vocations as Christians by helping them to join us in casting off that old man and putting on the new man and in the words of St. Paul, “be created in righteousness and true holiness”.

+In the Name...