

Trinity 15, 2017

“Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” (St. Matthew 6.33)

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Last week the Gospel presented us with the healing of the ten lepers. All ten were cleansed of their disease, but only one – a Samaritan – returned to give thanks. And, we are to see ourselves in that story. It is important for us to understand that, as human beings we all suffer from a spiritual infection called sin. Our nature is sick; it is fallen from the holiness and perfection God gave it in the beginning when He created Adam and Eve. As the Ninth Article of Religion says, “man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is, of his own nature, inclined to evil.”

And, forasmuch as we know this to be true in ourselves through our unholy thoughts and desires, our quick tempers, sharp tongues and selfish actions, we also know that this world is very far gone from original righteousness. Need I say anymore?

But there is hope for the Christian – an eternal Hope which changes everything. A Hope that causes us to rejoice in the Light, even on the darkest day. This Hope I am speaking of is not abstract or theoretical – it is personal. This Hope has been opened to us in the Person of Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God. And, it has been made known to us by the Holy Ghost. So in the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Ghost all that we need has been provided.

For the people of Israel, this understanding of God as Provider was central to their faith. To emphasize His faithfulness, they would say, ‘Jehovah-jireh’ – ‘the God Who provides’. Abraham introduced this Name for God on that day when he took his son, Isaac, into the woods. As a test of his faith, the Lord had instructed Abraham to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering. Incredibly, Abraham set off with Isaac and the wood that they would need for the fire. Along the way, Isaac asked his father a question. He said, “The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” In reply, Abraham in deep agony of spirit, said, “God Himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” And they walked on.

When they came to the place for the sacrifice, Abraham dutifully built an altar and laid out the wood. Then, with a horror that we cannot begin to imagine, he tied up his son and lifted him onto the wood. Then, surely with tears streaming down his cheeks, his heart-beat pounding in his ears, and totally nauseated and ready to vomit, Abraham drew his hunting knife and lifted it above his precious little boy. And, just as he was about to make that last, downward, fatal stabbing motion, the angel of the Lord stopped him. “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son from me.”

Then, in the beauty and relief of that moment, no doubt after sobbing on his knees and squeezing Isaac with a bear hug, and covering him with tears, Abraham saw a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. Then, after taking it and offering it, instead of his son, he called the place, Jehovah-jireh – ‘The Lord will provide’. ‘Jehovah’, the Name of the independent, perfect and self-complete Being – ‘I AM WHO I AM’ – He will provide.

Of course, the ram was not the end of the Lord’s provision for Abraham. In fact, before they left for home, the angel of the Lord appeared to Abraham again and said, “Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, and as the sand that is on the seashore.”

From this gripping account of God’s test of Abraham, and the provision of the ram, and God’s promise for the future, there is a key lesson for us. It is a lesson of Hope, and it is simply this: ‘The Lord will provide’.

In Abraham, the father who was willing to sacrifice his only son, we recognize God our Heavenly Father Who gave His only-begotten Son to suffer and die for us. And in the ram that was eventually offered, we also see Christ, the sinless Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world. As one preacher explained, “The stains which are on my hands and on my breast can be washed away with water, but the stains on my heart and character need the Blood of the Covenant. It is only the Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ that can cleanse us, and rid us from all sin.”

But even though we know this and believe it, we struggle daily to live by its Truth. And that’s what this morning’s Gospel is all about. Jehovah-jireh – the Lord will provide. He has provided us with the perfect Sacrifice for our sins through His

Son. He has opened the way from Heaven to earth, and from death to life through Christ Jesus. And He has provided us with His own comfort and counsel, and with many wonderful gifts, by His Spirit Who dwells in us. Still, we doubt Him and we question His ability to meet our needs.

And so Jesus says to us, "Consider the lilies ...if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven; shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" In other words, look around you. Look around and look up. See what beauty and greatness the Lord has created. Mark the perfect order in nature. Check it in the systems and abilities of your own body. Then ask yourself, if God is able and wise enough to do all of this; and if He has done this with such beauty and love, shall He not provide what I need?

And yet, as long as we live here, Satan will tempt us to doubt the Lord's faithfulness and the Lord's ability to provide. He did that to Adam and Eve and Satan continues that with us. 'You need more of such and such. Don't sell yourself short. You deserve it. Relax. Take it easy.' With all these ploys he tries to destroy our faith and throw us off our course, placing material things before spiritual things; temporary things as being more important than eternal ones; and my will before the God's Will.

And yet, whenever I listen to Satan, I become filled with worries and fears. I focus on what is below rather than on what is above. I become anxious, irritable and frustrated. I try to fix things myself and I try to manage my time too much. This is the thing: No man can serve two masters...Ye cannot serve God and Mammon (the material things/powers of the world). Anxiety – an epidemic in our society – because we are trying to serve two masters.

And so the Lord of Heaven and earth Who loves us and wants us to be with Him, shows us day after day His goodness and mercy. He does this simply and beautifully in the lilies of the field; the little birds; the trees standing tall and straight; the rivers and streams; the tides; the moon and the stars; and the sun which rises and sets according to His schedule, not ours.

All of that He does to remind us Whose we are. We belong to Him. And with Him and in Him is Hope and Peace, and true happiness; and, everlasting Life. Let us then do as Jesus instructs us today: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His

righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.” All that you need will be provided by Jehovah-jireh.

And now unto God Almighty: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost be ascribed all majesty, dominion, power and glory for ever and ever. AMEN.