

Trinity Sunday, 2017

“And He that sat (on the throne) was to look upon like a jasper and a sardius stone” (Revelation 4.3)

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

For years we had a piece of corrugated roofing or siding loaded with little rocks, on a bookshelf in our TV room. It was the “piece de resistance” as they say. All three of our kids added to it over the years after trips to the beach. There were bits of quartz and smooth shale, some tiny white rocks which resembled teeth, and there were also a number of fragments of colored glass, polished over time by the water.

Interestingly, in this morning’s Lesson, St. John used two stones to describe the Lord as he saw Him in His vision. He said, “Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was set in heaven, and One sat on the throne: and He that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardius stone.” According to one geologist, “Jasper comes from a root word meaning ‘to polish’. In fact, one of the characteristics of jasper is that it is able to take a high polish and was used in ancient times as mantles, pillars, vases, and other interior decorations.” Jasper is known for its strength, and, although it may come in a variety of colours, it is often red. The jasper stone is mentioned in the Old Testament as being the last of the twelve stones in the breastplate of the High Priest.

In addition to jasper, St. John mentioned, the sardius stone: “He that sat on the throne was to look upon like a jasper and a sardius stone”. According to one rock expert, “Sardonyx made beautiful cameos, and was often extravagantly carved. The Romans developed this craft of engraving into a fine art. Great quantities of quality sardonyx came from India during this time. Even Julius Caesar, the Roman general, became an avid collector of engraved sardonyx. The name ‘sardius’ or ‘sardonyx’ indicates the layers of color found in the stone. It is possible that the sardonyx of Bible times was not limited to the reddish-brown and white stripes. Pliny the Elder, a first century Roman naturalist and military commander, described imitation sardonyx made of a triple stripe of quality white, red and black stone cemented together.”

The triple stripe of sardius, of course, has great significance for us. It is a subtle reminder of the Three Persons of God united in essence and substance within the Holy and Eternal Trinity. As the Creed of St. Athanasius says, “The Godhead of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal” .

Like jasper, sardius was also included in the High Priest’s breastplate, only it was the first stone of the twelve stones that represented the twelve tribes of Israel. So, sardius was the first stone in the breastplate and jasper was the last. The mention of these two in today’s Lesson – the first and the last stones -- is not accidental. By them, we are reminded that all of the twelve tribes – or, all of God’s people, including us as members of the Church, which is ‘the new Israel’ – are held by God. Actually we are more than ‘held’ we have been united, grafted and joined by God to Himself through Christ. He has come to dwell in us by His Spirit!

There is much more that could be said about the significance of the precious stones of jasper and sardius, but let’s move on to consider the rainbow. In his vision, St. John saw “a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald”. In his sermon on this Lesson 165 years ago, E.B. Pusey of the Church of England, emphasized this reference as being for our comfort. He said, “From the beginning, the rainbow has been the token of God’s mercy. It was given that we might understand that God had promised to destroy the world no more by the waters of a flood. It is the token that the storm is past, the rain is over and gone. It is the bearer of God’s gracious message of pardon...” .

So far, then, we have two precious stones – jasper and sardius – and the rainbow. In these, we have the message of God’s strength and beauty as Three Persons in One, Who has revealed Himself with Mercy and Grace. But there is something else for us to consider. The One Who sat upon the throne, with the emerald rainbow; the lightnings, thunderings and voices; the twenty four elders; the seven lamps of fire; the sea of glass; and the four living creatures – that Holy and Eternal One said something. St. John heard Him speak, and His Word was very clear, like a trumpet: “Come up hither,” He said “and I will show thee things which must be hereafter” .

“Come up hither”. “Come”. “You – my creature -- mortal man, come up here.” “Lift up your head. Open your eyes and your heart and look beyond the earthly, the material, the physical, and all that limits you...Come up here and see what goes on in the land of everlasting Life, in the Kingdom of Heaven”. It is a call to a new Way – to God’s Way. It is a summons to see and to live differently. It is an offer of new life – the new and eternal life of God by the Spirit of His Son, Jesus Christ.

You may be thinking that all of this is just too strange. It was something God revealed to St. John, many, many years ago and therefore it cannot be for you. But hold on! Listen to the words of the Lord Jesus in this morning’s Gospel. He said to Nicodemus, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God....Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit....Ye must be born again.”

Jesus said this to Nicodemus, but it is also true for us. We, too, must be born again. We, too, must be born of the Holy Spirit. We must be joined to Christ Jesus and live the new life. So the voice which St. John heard, calling him to “come up and see things which must be hereafter,” is also for you and me. The almighty, everlasting and glorious Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Ghost wants us to be with Him. He Who sits above the universe, and has created all things in Heaven and earth; He Who alone is perfect and holy, calls to us, through His blessed Son, the Saviour, to come. “Come unto Me all that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you”. I will refresh you. I will hold you. I will forgive you. I will heal you. I will strengthen you. I will save you and sanctify you....So come. Come unto Me. Come up hither.”

As we move into the summer months, the Bible readings will help us to reflect more on the personal nature of this call. The Triune God is totally ‘other’ from us, and yet, He is present with us. He is totally beyond us in majesty and power, in holiness and beauty; and yet He is with us and actually dwells in us by His Spirit. He is eternal, and yet He stooped down in the Person of His Son to be come mortal.

Whatever your situation today. Whatever your challenges, worries or fears, hear the simple word again from God. “Come,” He says “come up here”. “Lift up your

heart and open your eyes and see my handiwork. I am with you and I will never leave you. You are mine. I love you with an everlasting love. Let me fill you with my Spirit so that you may live in the Hope and Promise of the Risen Christ.”

We cannot understand Him, for His Way is mysterious; but we can begin to love Him, for He has first loved us. We cannot fathom His love, but we can believe that it is real. We must be born again, dear friends. He calls us to come, so let us run to Him.

And now unto God Almighty: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost