



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

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Second Sunday in Advent - December 8, 2013

✠ **In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.** ✠

Sermon on Bible Sunday

The passage selected for the sermon this morning is taken from the Epistle:

**“Whatsoever things were written
aforetime were written for our learning,
that we, through patience and comfort of
the Scriptures, might have hope.”**

The Second Sunday in Advent is called “Bible Sunday”. Both the Collect and the Epistle direct us to patiently read the Scriptures for comfort and hope of our everlasting life. The Collect uses two peculiar words, patience and digestion, which require some meditation and reflection. We will examine these terms and investigate the place of Scripture in the Anglican Tradition.

Advent is the season of preparation for the Coming of Christ. Last week we were reminded that we are not preparing for the Nativity, but for the Second Coming Of our Lord in Glory and Judgment. Modern man, the rational scientific man, who rejects the Mystical nature of Christ and His Church, tends to reduce these prophecies to symbolism and allegory. The Scriptures about the Second Coming are absolutely true, and not to be confused by the presumption and pride of the modern mind.

Our Lord chastised those disciples that failed to take Him literally. He was saddened when many of His followers turned from Him when He explained the hard truth that He must be consumed as the Bread of Life, but He stood by those words and

demanded that we believe therein if we are to be His true followers. It is our peril of damnation to re-fit the hard words of Scripture to the comfort of our modern mind and weak consciences.

The readings for today remind us that we learn to be hopeful when, with patience, we hear, read, learn, mark and digest the Scripture. Most of those words are straightforward and easily understood. But patience and digestion need some extra work.

Patience in reading the scriptures is required at several levels. The Bible is a long book, written in multiple styles, through the inspiration of many authors. Scripture reflects cultures, languages, and histories that are strange, even alien to the modern mind. We have many styles, Epistle, Gospel, prophecy, history, poetry and allegory. How many of us, picking up the Bible for the first time, get as far as Deuteronomy or Leviticus and just put the book away, despairing that we would ever understand it. Honestly, it is an unintelligible book, without the benefit of Revelation and the Apostolic and Catholic Tradition that interprets it.

We need patience in reading scripture through our whole lives. Job means something very different to a couple who have lost a child than to a young person. Genesis is different to the scientist than to the couple contemplating marriage. Eternity means tomorrow for a toddler, it means the length of credit card debt in middle age, and it means tomorrow again, in a different way at the end of life. We need to read and re-read the Bible throughout life

because it speaks afresh to us in every age and circumstance of life.

Patience also means that we have to read and hear with quiet and receptivity. Listening in our culture most often means impatiently waiting for the other person to stop talking so that we can speak. To listen patiently does not mean a dialogue of equals. Scripture is the Word of God. Jesus is the Word made flesh. Scripture is an Incarnation of God and has authority over us. We can't cherry pick it, selectively accept it, or judge it.

When we listen to God's word, we have only one response, the response of Mary to Gabriel and of Jesus in Gethsemane, "thy will be done". We cannot do God's will unless we hear it. We need to meditate on the passages, learn and mark them as they are taught by the church, and prepare ourselves to say intentionally and purposefully, "thy will be done".

Patience also means to listen humbly so that we can get the right understanding of scripture. It is our tendency to think of the whole world only in relation to what it means to our lives, in this place and in this time. But the Bible is the truth written for all men, in all times and in all places. Yes, the Bible speaks to us personally. Yes, we can have epiphanies, but no, we are not free to impatiently and pridefully interpret the Scripture as what we need, or what we feel. We know that our interpretation is sinfully wrong when it leads to conclusions that are in opposition to or lead to rejection of the authority of the Church.

St. Peter addresses this inclination in his 2nd general Epistle:

“We, (the Apostles) have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well to take heed as unto a light that shineth in a dark place...Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation, for the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but by Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. St. Peter II, 1: 19-21

Before His resurrection, our Lord tells the Apostles to go forth and teach the Good News. He doesn't say, go tell the story and I will follow behind interpreting for Billy and Roy and Fred. The people of God, who lived by His word in the Old

Testament, got the whole Book wrong. They were unprepared for his coming and they lost their birthright.

Modern man has swallowed the prideful belief in evolution that allows us to believe that we are the pinnacle of God's Creation. But Jesus Christ is the pinnacle of Creation and no amount of evolution and progress will make us like Him. We only become like Him by grace.

We are no smarter than the Jews of the first century. Without the Apostolic interpretation of both the Old and New Testament, we will get it wrong, too, and we put our birth right at risk when He comes again. He prepared twelve men, the Apostles, to teach scripture. He sent them the Holy Ghost, in a unique and special way, at Pentecost. The power given them was the power to preach and teach the word of God. That power was not given to everyone in Jerusalem. The Apostles were commissioned to pass that gift to their designees, the bishops. That is what Apostolic Succession means, the passing of a gift from the Apostles to our Bishops to make sure the Church teaches the Good News the right way, the only way that will prepare us for the Second Coming.

Finally, we come to this funny word, - "digest". Digestion means that food which was extraneous to our being is taken in and converted to be our energy, our sustenance and ultimately our substance.

The scriptures are our Spiritual food. It is one way that Jesus comes to be in us and we in Him. We feed on the scripture by faith with thanksgiving and his word becomes energy for us, sustenance, and ultimately, it becomes our substance, the life of Christ in us and our life manifest in Him. "Man does not live by bread alone, but by the very Word of God." St. Luke 4:4

We have that beautiful progression. Jesus is the Way and the Life. Jesus is the Word. Jesus is the Bread of Heaven. He has made a gift of His life for us, that we will be nourished, both by His Word, and by the sacrament of His Body and Blood. That is why we celebrate a Mass that provides food as both Scripture and Bread of Life

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

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