

## **Sermon for the Second Sunday in Advent**

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“For what ever was written in former days was written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope.” (Romans 15:4)

Today is Bible Sunday. This title is based on today's uniquely Anglican collect which begins, “Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning . . .” (BCP page 92) While the Bible is not the theme of Advent, today's collect certainly gives me an opportunity to preach and teach about the Bible.

Many sincere men and women, among them many Christians, see the God of the Old Testament as a God of judgment. In the New Testament they see Him as a God of love and mercy. It is almost as if they see two separate gods in the Bible. This thinking is not new. For early in the history of the Church, the heretic Marcion declared that the God of the Old Testament is the devil of the New Testament. He considered the Old Testament to be an evil non Christian book. And he taught that many books of the New Testament were tainted with the evil of the Old Testament. On this basis he totally rejected the Old Testament, and then he proceeded to cut out books and pieces of the New Testament, until there was not much Bible left. Today, it seems that in much of the Church Marcion's heresy has become a modern Christian “orthodoxy.” The Old Testament with its apparently judgmental and violent God is in many places rudely ostracized without consideration.

As we know, this teaching about the Bible is a false one, because God does not change, and there is but one God. The error lies in considering each part of the Bible by itself, requiring each book to stand alone, speaking by itself. In this thinking, the book of Esther fails to mention God, hence it is a godless book and should be removed from the Bible. And, the bloodthirsty God of

Genesis and I Samuel has not even read the great love chapter of I Corinthians 13. So, in the thinking of some modern Christians, these Old Testament books are not *really* a part of the Bible.

When the Church selected the books of the Bible, it was not intended that the Bible should be read piecemeal, but that it should be read as whole. And as a whole, the organizing principle of the Bible is its witness to our Lord Jesus Christ. All of the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, either proclaims or points to Jesus. The Old Testament is the Book about God's people before Christ redeemed mankind by His passion and resurrection. The Old Testament points toward the coming Messiah who will redeem mankind. The Old Testament points to the cross from Genesis to Malachi, from beginning to end. So, it pictures unredeemed mankind living in all his violence and sin. It is a testament to mankind who is in need of redemption. Yet, it presents this violent reality while pointing to Jesus Christ as the One who is to come to redeem the world and restore the broken relationship between God and man. This aspect of the Old Testament gives invaluable meaning to that which scandalizes our overly sensitive, modern, and politically correct ideas of who God is. God's fierce violence in the Old Testament scriptures is a reality, because one who is not reconciled to God is certain to taste the fiery judgment of the holy God. If we reject Jesus, whom out of love for us, God sent, we will face the wrath of God.

The Old Testament is St. Paul's topic in today's epistle. He wrote, "For whatever was written in former days was written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort might have hope." St. Augustine taught that **the New Testament lies concealed in the Old Testament and the Old Testament is revealed in the New.** The Church teaches that, "the Old Testament is not contrary to the New: for in both the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to Mankind by Christ. . . ." (Articles of Religion, Art. VII) The Old Testament is like the bud of a flower. It is

the whole flower, but the whole truth of the beauty of the flower is hidden within the closed bud. The New Testament is like a blooming flower, in which the beauty and truth of the whole flower of the Gospel is revealed. The Old Testament points to Christ, it is a record of God's preparation of the world for the coming Messiah. Jesus is revealed, but in a hidden and mystical way. In the New Testament God puts aside the mystery of His person and nature. He reveals Himself in human flesh. In the Old Testament we see mankind as he would be without Christ, with God patiently leading us toward Jesus Christ. In the new Testament Jesus comes and takes hold of us and begins a new life in us.

So, read the Bible. Read all of it, both the Old and the New Testaments. We Anglican Christians, and indeed all Christians are called to be lovers and students of the Bible, because study of the Bible is fundamental to Christian growth and maturity. Make the Bible a primary part of your devotional life, for in the Bible God not only reveals Himself, He also reveals to us the reality of our past, our fallen human nature from which each of us has been redeemed by the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. "For what ever was written in former days was written for our learning, that we might have hope" in Jesus Christ. Amen.