

St. John's Episcopal Church  
Hamlin, Pennsylvania  
The Rev'd. Canon John H. Wilson  
The Second Sunday After Pentecost  
7 June 2015

Scripture readings:

I Samuel 8:4-20, 11:14-15    Psalm 138    II Corinthians 4:13-5:1    Mark 3:20-35

Last Sunday was Trinity Sunday. The day after was Monday and then we begin in the Church's Year what is called the Ordinary Time. We thank God for the seasons of the Church's Year as we thank God for the seasons of nature's year. So may we consider for a moment or two the importance of some of these seasons and their significance.

We begin on Advent Sunday - adventure, something coming, something exciting. Advent is the time when we prepare penitentially for the great season of Christmas. And so the liturgical color in Advent is purple, the color of mourning. Then Advent prepares us, of course, for Christmas, the birth of our Savior, the Word made flesh. The color, of course, is white.

Christmas has two parts. First of all, the part when we think of the shepherds coming into Bethlehem to worship the infant Christ. And the second part we call Epiphany - the showing forth, the manifestation to the gentiles represented by the three kings or the three wise men, however you like to think of them. And that's the second part of Christmas. But Christmas doesn't end there, contrary to what a lot of people think. You come to my house from the sixth of January to the second of February and you will find all the decorations up and everything there. Why the second of February?

*From the congregation: "Groundhog's Day!" [Laughter]*

In America you've spoiled so much. However, rubbish to Groundhog's Day. *[Laughter]* It's the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple. On the fortieth day after the birth of a male child the parents brought him to the Temple to offer him to the Lord, and that's the second of February.

Then we move on a bit further to the season called Lent. Lent is just another word for spring. But, in fact, from the point of view of our liturgy it is a time of preparation for something special: Easter. A time of penitence again. And, of course, Lent ends with Holy Week, the most important week in the Christian Year, culminating in Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday - called the *Triduum*, the three special days. And then we have all those lovely ceremonies on Holy Saturday evening as we've had interesting ceremonies on Maundy Thursday with the washing of the feet. Did you know, by the way, that every Maundy Thursday the Queen goes to a different cathedral every year, and when she's there she distributes what is called the Maundy Money. Maundy, of course, comes from the word "commandment." "*A new commandment I give to thee: love one another.*"

According to her age, she gives the Maundy Money. It's a little bag with special coins in it. She's older than I am so she's getting on to ninety. So she gives that many bags of the Maundy Money to the people.

Well, then we celebrate Easter. Of course the color is white, and we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, in which we share. We are raised together with him - right at the very heart of our faith, the very heart of the Gospel.

I forgot to say, incidentally - this is another correction to you beloved Americans - that the fourth Sunday in Lent we call Mothering Sunday. Sadly, so many things come from your country to mine, and many people now call it Mother's Day. You have Mother's Day a little later on, and they're not the same. Mothering

Sunday is this: centuries ago when the population of the country was a lot bigger and there wasn't enough work, young people would move away from where they'd been born to seek work elsewhere. But on the fourth Sunday in Lent, because the reading refers to the Church as our mother, they will come back to where they had been baptized, their Mother Church. And that's what Mothering Sunday means, the place where we've been baptized.

I was taught many years ago to thank God at the beginning of the day when I first touch water, to thank God for my baptism. I still try to do it, to remember when I was made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven. You might like to think about that. You might like to do it. You probably don't remember your baptism but, nonetheless, you can thank God for it. And those three very special things - a member of Christ; *the*, not just one of many, but *the* child of God as though you are special because you *are*; and an inheritor, one who here and now is receiving something of the Kingdom of Heaven.

So we move on from Easter to Ascension Day when our Lord was parted from the visible sight of his friends. I think the most interesting thing about Ascensiontide is when our Lord was parted from his friends, they went back to Jerusalem filled with joy. You'd think they'd be brokenhearted. On the contrary, we're told that they went back to Jerusalem filled with joy.

And so to Pentecost, Whitsunday, when we celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon us - wind and fire, enabling us, encouraging us, urging us to bear faithful witness to the Gospel.

I'll tell you a little story about Trinity Sunday which, of course, is the next one. It was last Sunday. It was a week after Pentecost. When I was ordained priest which is sixty years ago on Trinity Sunday next year, we had a silent retreat from Tuesday until we went to the cathedral in Winchester for the ordination. It was a silent retreat. We weren't allowed to talk, and we weren't allowed out. However, one of the candidates, one of the men being ordained, did find the silence unbearable. So he decided to go out into the town. Unfortunately, in the town he met the bishop. *[Laughter]* And the bishop said, "*Oh, what are you doing here? You're not supposed to be out. You're supposed to be in the house in preparation.*" "*Well,*" the young man said, thinking quickly, "*Well, my Lord, I was moved by the Holy Spirit to come into the town to do some shopping.*" *[Laughter]* And the bishop said, "*That's very interesting. The Holy Spirit must have forgotten something because today is Wednesday and it's early closing day.*" *[Laughter]*

However, we must draw to a close. After Trinity Sunday, as I said in the beginning, we move into what is called Ordinary Time, and that's a time when we don't have those seasons anymore until Christ the King at the end, a time when we are meant to learn, to grow, and to develop in the faith and in our witness.

One last word because all this is to do with our preparation for heaven. We don't have heaven on earth, as we well know. But we are risen together with Christ, and one of my favorite descriptions of heaven was written by Augustine of Hippo, an African Bishop, who described heaven like this:

*We shall rest and we shall see,  
We shall see and we shall love,  
We shall love and we shall praise,  
Behold what shall be in the end  
But have no end.*

Amen.