

Wednesday in the Fourth Week of Lent: Patrick, Bishop and Missionary of Ireland, 462

March 17, 2021

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Exodus 32:7–14; Psalm 106:19–23; John 3:16; John 5:30–47*

Today’s gospel lesson follows the controversy with “the Jews” that erupts in the temple when Jesus heals a lame man on the sabbath.¹ I have come to prefer to say “the Judeans” to saying “the Jews,” especially in light of the anti-Semitism in John’s gospel. For the record, the word in Greek is *Ἰουδαῖος—Judea*.²

We’re in chapter 5, but in chapter 8, we will read that Jesus said, speaking to the Judeans, “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”³ It is never appointed to be read at Mass or the Daily Office. That said, the Prayer Book rubrics⁴ and the canons that govern the Episcopal Church permit a rector or a priest-in-charge to lengthen any appointed lessons.⁵ At Saint Mary’s, we read the entire New Testament at Daily Morning and Evening Prayer.

Today’s passage is important for what it says about believing and just hearing the voice of Jesus. “Jesus said to the Judeans, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one who hears my word and believes the One who sent me, has eternal life; he or she does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is,

¹ John 5:1–18.

² John 5:1.

³ John 5:44.

⁴ *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 888, 934.

⁵ *Constitution and Canons together with the Rules of Order For the governance of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, otherwise known as The Episcopal Church Adopted and Revised in General Conventions 1789–2018* (2018), Title III, Canon 9, Sec. 6 (a)1, 2,

when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.”⁶

These last words are a great comfort to many, including myself, when someone I know dies. I also associate these verses with a prayer that originated in *Family Prayers and Bible Readings*, published in London in 1896.⁷ The prayer was edited and included in the 1928 Prayer Book. It’s still in the book. Credit for its adaption in the American church belongs to Charles Lewis Slattery, who published it in his *Prayers for Private and Family Use* in 1922. He was then rector of Grace Church here in the city and later bishop of Massachusetts. Its title is: “For Those We Love:”

*Almighty God, we entrust all who are dear to us to thy never-failing care and love, for this life and the life to come, knowing that thou art doing for them better things than we can desire or pray for; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*⁸

Finally, I want to acknowledge that today is Saint Patrick’s Day. I took the trouble to look at the entry today for Saint Patrick in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. I have come not to trust what I read in *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* without further checking. He was a historical figure, a bishop and missionary of Ireland and to Ireland. Though legends spring up, there are enough reliable manuscripts to tell us something about his remarkable life. *The Oxford Dictionary* states, “Towards the end of his life Patrick wrote, in Latin, a moving personal account of his spiritual pilgrimage, called his Confession, perhaps in response to a serious attack on his character and career which was certainly made on him at some point during his episcopacy.”⁹ Next year, I will be ready to preach about Patrick.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

⁶ John 5:24–25. I have altered the RSV to reflect the inclusive forms of the Greek.

⁷ Massey H. Shepherd, Jr., *The Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 597.

⁸ *The Book of Common Prayer* (1928), 597; (1979), 831.

⁹ *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (ODCC) 2ed. (New York: Oxford University Press 1978), s.v. “Patrick, St.” 1043.