

A Sermon by the Rev. Dr. Robert R. Hansel for the Last Sunday after Pentecost, November 21, 2010 at The Chapel of St. Mark in Port Royal, South Carolina.

### **A Parable about the Two Seas**

This morning I want to share with you a story. The story is in the form of a Parable. As you know, from listening to many such stories that were told by Jesus, it is short. I don't know who first told or wrote this story. Like all parables, it invites you to think about something that is very ordinary and, then, to make a comparison or parallel between simple things like coins, sheep, or lamps and things that are much more complex. Always, in the end, the parable winds up being a story about US. The parable makes us see ourselves in a new way.

The particular story that I'm going to tell you today is one that I think Jesus would have loved and might even have told—but it's not really THAT old. The first time I heard it was in 1959. At that time I was attending Christ Church in Cincinnati, a great church that carried out an amazing urban ministry right in the heart of the city. Each year Christ Church held a grand dinner, complete with white damask and crystal, not just for the members but for all of the leadership people of the city. The purpose of the dinner was to celebrate all of the programs of providing food for the hungry, homes for the homeless, and recreation for kids who, otherwise, would be lost to the street gangs...and to encourage people, with the means, to give generously and sacrificially so those programs might continue. There was always an invited guest speaker—sometimes a church person, sometimes not. In 1959 the speaker was Bishop William Burrill of Chicago.

Bishop Burrill didn't make the usual, expected presentation. There wasn't a long speech about the value of the church's urban ministries. There was no boring review of the budget and, most importantly, there was no appeal for money...in fact, no mention of money at all. He simply told this parable:

#### TWO SEAS

There are two seas in Palestine. One is fresh and there are fish in it. Splashes of green adorn its banks. Trees spread their branches over it and stretch out their thirsty roots to sip of its healing waters. Along its shores the children play, as children played when Jesus was there. He loved that sea. He could look across its gentle silver waves when he spoke his teaching parables. And on a rolling plain not far away he fed five thousand people.

The River Jordan empties into this sea, bringing sparkling clear water from the surrounding hills. So it is constantly replenished, laughing, it seems, in the pleasant sunshine. People build houses near that sea and birds build their nests. Every kind of life is happier for being there.

The River Jordan flows on south and creates another sea. Here there is no flash of fish, no fluttering leaf, no song of birds, no children's laughter. Scavengers feed on rotting and poisoned game. Travelers choose another route, unless on urgent business. The air

hangs heavy above its sullen surface, and neither man nor beast nor fowl ever drink of those waters.

What makes such a complete difference between these two neighboring seas? It's not the River Jordan. That stream delivers the same good water into both alike. It's not the soil in which they lie, nor is it anything different about the country in which they are found.

This is the difference: The Sea of Galilee receives but does not keep the water brought to it by the River Jordan. For every drop of water that flows into that sea, a drop flows out. The giving and receiving go on constantly, in equal measure.

The other, the second sea, hoards its watery income jealously. It will not be tempted to share by any generous impulse. Every drop it gets, it keeps.

The Sea of Galilee gives and lives. The other sea keeps and kills. That sea, because it gives nothing is named The Dead Sea. Give and live; keep and kill. It's a rule that applies to all things. There are two kinds of people in the world. There are two seas in Palestine.

Let us pray: Almighty God, whose loving hand has given us everything that we are and all that we have: Grant that we may always live in such a way that our every thought and action proclaims a joyous message of thanksgiving. Teach us that we are but stewards who are called to manage and to share the gifts that you have provided, holding them in trust to carry out your loving purposes. Keep us free of selfishness and pride, deceiving ourselves by imagining that we can turn our backs on our sisters and brothers who are in need. Remembering the account which we must one day give, may we ever be faithful and generous stewards of your bounty, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*