

Sermon for the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

'Because of the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, I will go down to see whether they have done according to the outcry that has come to me.'

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Fifty years ago, and eight days past, a certain man planted a certain tinfoil box upon an endless desert. A 'beautiful desolation,' he called it. This desolation Adam himself had gazed upon in the *cool of the evening*, and Eve in the dawn of the morning, for forever it had haunted and shined upon the world. This beautiful desolation was the moon.

This certain man was given the mission to walk upon the surface our earth's ever present sentinel. But before he exited his tinfoil box to wander upon the void expanse of endless grey dust, he opened for himself a gift given to him by his priest: two small pouches, one containing a liquid which he poured slowly into a cup in the frail gravity of the moon, the other containing a wafer, familiar to you all. Upon another sphere of heaven, Edwin Aldrin consecrated himself with the body and blood of Christ, before he consecrated the dust of another world with the image and likeness of God.

Perhaps this was but the beginning of the completion of God's mission to man, to *have dominion over the universe*, but to NASA, it was but the completion of the beginning of God's own task of creation.

For less than a year earlier, this nation had sent a man to orbit the moon in preparation of the future landing. And as the crew of that vessel came around from the dark side of the moon to see the earth rising in the horizon on Christmas Eve, [before the rising Light of the sun], they broadcast a reading: *'In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.'*

They read the account from the book of Genesis, of the creation; and Frank

Borman, having completed his reading with the words, '*and God saw that it was good,*' concluded his crew's address to humanity with these simple, elegant words: 'Good night, good luck, a Merry Christmas, and God bless you all, all of you on the good Earth.'

Orbiting the moon, man had prayed the sacred Scriptures in adoration of God's fashioning of the heavens and the earth. Landing on the moon, man brought to its battered surface the body and blood of the Lord, for it is written '*You have set your glory above the heavens.*' Above the heavens, above the 'good Earth.'

Yet we read that the Lord, speaking to Abraham, shall destroy those who dwell upon this world, these cities of Sodom and Gomorrah; they shall be destroyed, for their wickedness is heard not just by the moon and stars, but by the seraphs and thrones of the heaven beyond the heavens.

If there had been fifty who in gratitude thanked God for the good Earth, these would have been spared. If there had been forty five who praised the Almighty for the honor of being human, the earth beneath them would not have been shattered. If there were thirty who looked upon their Lord in penitence, seeking mercy, their towers would not have been overturned. If there had been twenty who put their hope in the Wisdom of God, then fire should not have rained from the skies rendering the works of man an inferno. If there had been ten who had *but faith the size of a mustard seed*, sulfur should not have consumed the land, crushing it into a dust of desolation, a desolation unlike the moon, not beautiful, but an abomination.

'What is man, that you are mindful of him, and the son of man, that you care for him?'

Man is the image and likeness of God, created to rule the heavens and the earth, and destined for the immortality of heaven. But man has rejected this mission. He will not rule creation, he will be ruled by it. Created as a king, man chooses to become a slave. Created above all creation, he chooses to be beneath all creation. Against eternity, he chooses mortality. Against the Eternal God, he chooses a passing flesh. Against the hope of resurrection, he chooses the fatalism of fallen human irrationality.

When God had offered a fish, they had chosen a serpent; for poison we preferred to medicine.

When God had offered an egg, they had chosen a scorpion; for suffering we preferred to salvation.

When God had offered bread, they had chosen a stone; for lifelessness we preferred to life.

In overturning Sodom and Gomorrah, God did not punish the inhabitants of that wicked land. Rather, he gave them the desire of their hearts: a serpent, a scorpion, a stone; poison, suffering, death.

Abraham intercedes for the wicked lands, and God gives even ten of them a chance to ask for what is good; yet they rapaciously demand what is evil, and so evil is given to them. Evil given, to man, man who dwells upon the good Earth.

These are the words of our mouth, the prayers of our corrupted flesh, to ask for wealth, for success, for the gratification of our lusts; we pray for idolatry; we pray to be enslaved to created things; those things to which we were to rule over. We pray for this slavery, to these idols, for our tongue is forked, for in choosing the serpent over God, we chose the mouth of Satan over the Word of the Lord.

But the good Earth is rising over the horizon of the beautiful desolation of the moon, and, though it be Summer, Christmas is upon us, for the Word of God is made flesh, to bring to us a new mouth, a new tongue, a new prayer.

Our Lord Christ, made flesh, teaches us to pray. He does not say, *'when you pray, say something like "Our Father".'* He does not want us to be imaginative with words. He does not want us to pray our own words, for we who are fallen have no words of our own, only the serpent's. Rather He says *'when you pray, say "Our Father."*

He gives us His own word to make our own, that we may rightly pray for what is truly needful to us [and no longer worship ourselves]. That we may not pray for avarice, lust, ambition; but rather for faith, hope, and love.

For no longer should we, *who are evil*, pray for the serpent of our fall, but for the fish of our forgiveness, for in baptism, we are born again into living water, to breath the grace of the spring of baptism all the days of our everlasting life. Indeed this is our faith.

And no longer should we pray for the scorpion of our fleshly longings, but for the

egg of our rebirth, for dwelling within the Holy Communion of the Church, we shall not die, but rest until the resurrection of our flesh to rest forevermore in the beauty of the Lord. This is our hope.

And no longer shall we pray for the stone of our sinful hard-heartedness, but for the bread of unity, bread which is made of many grains, yet in the fire of God's own compassion, is made one. This is our love.

These then, are the gifts promised by God, for which He pleads we ask in the Words of His Son.

For in the beginning, He looked upon the work of His creation, and *behold, it was very good.*

And our God will not rest until [He '*disarms the rulers and authorities, and puts them to open shame, that*]; that He may once again look past the desolation of rebellion which we willed, and, by His redemption, rest; and [gaze upon His redeemed creation,]; in the Light of His speaking, to gaze upon the 'good Earth'.

For he will never '*forsake the work of his hands.*'

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*Preached by Pastor
Fields*

*Sermon texts: Genesis
18:17-33; Colossians 2:6-19; Luke 11:1-13*