

First Evening Prayer of Lent

Bulletin

Lent has begun, a season devoted to reverent penitence, that knowing we shall soon witness our Lord's suffering for the sake of our iniquity, we must know for what reason the Christ did bleed

All have failed, and each in their own way; and it is proper during this time to recognize our failings and seek to correct them.

For this reason, confessing that during my entire time as a pastor of this church, and preaching from this pulpit in this sanctuary, I have never once preached on the Epistle reading for the week, I shall at this time make my penance, and spend these Wednesday evenings opening up the Epistle you heard the past Sunday, and gleaning from them some wisdom, that we may know our Lord's face, and the blessing of His sacred wounds.

If to preach the Gospel is to give my cloak, tonight I will offer my tunic also.

Therefore, it is written:

'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart.'

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The Word is indeed near, even in everything that we see, and everything that we are. For by the Word of God were the heavens made and the earth separated therefrom, the seas populated with living things and the land with beasts. And even before the Word was spoken to our ears by the lips of the prophets, it was implanted in us by the breath of the Lord breathed into the dust of our first father.

All the world is but the Word made tangible, touchable, or as we falsely consider it, real; as it is written, *'by the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.'* *'For he spoke, and it came to be; he*

commanded, and it stood firm.’ ‘For my hand laid the foundations of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I call to them, they stand forth together.’ ‘For you created all things, and by your will do they exist.’

‘By him all things were made.’

For when we lie down to rest, we rest upon the *firmament spread over the deep*, and we rise again *to the greater light, to govern the day*. We gaze up on *the stars set for times and seasons*, and eat of *every tree bearing fruit*, we marry and give in marriage *men, made in his image, after his likeness*, and we die to the *dust* from which *the Lord raises the poor*.

And if it was not enough that we be formed of the Word, live in the Word, eat the Word, drink the Word, look upon the Word made firm and solid in the manifold works of the Lord’s hand; in all this we call creation; by the mouths of holy men our Lord spoke his word to us in a direct manner, as a man calling to a man, that we may not be alone, but may know our God, not by the strength of our reason and the sign and symbol of nature, but may know Him as we know a friend, through conversation and through time.

Yet such is still not enough; not for the Lord who loves us, and would for us *suffer all, even death, for the sake of the glory set before him. The glory of God, which is the living man*.

So, in the fullness of time, *the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us*, that the Word may not merely be in us, and everywhere around us, and spoken to us, but that it might become us, that the Word might *be all, and in all*.

Indeed, *the Word is near you*. Is in you; has become you. Him in whom the *fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily; bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh*.

Now the Word made flesh has come into the world, and by the rebirth of water, and the incarnation of Holy Communion, has come to enflesh itself in you.

What then, shall this Word do, that so richly indwells your failing body?

It is in our pride that we believe that it is only fitting that we prepare a proper palace for this Word which fills us. We shall clean the halls of our heart, prepare within it a burning fire of virtue, kindness, chastity, purity; prepare it a chamber within which to rest at one time, and to rise at another, and in our lives plant for

it a garden in which to pleasantly wander. In these things, the Christian strives to live a good, and most assuredly, a godly life.

And yet the halls of our heart are not clean, but an *open sepulchre*, corrupted by the putrid flesh of the *fear of death* which haunts our minds; the fire of virtue we stoke becomes a conflagration of pride; and pride leading to boasting, a tongue, a *world of unrighteousnesses*, which becomes nothing but a hell of hypocrisy, a pit of flame emitting only darkness, where there is only despair and bitterness, *weeping and gnashing of teeth*. The life of the garden we plant grows not into Christian happiness and contentment, but into famine and plague, as our lusts harm first another, and then ourselves, as *having not, we murder, and coveting and receiving not, we quarrel*.

Have you prepared a palace for the Word of our Lord to dwell? It is a wreckage, a roofless ruin of toppled stone, once beautiful, now destroyed by time and weakness and neglect, lost in vines that choke the seed that would grow, infested with rodents.

It is by no means a fitting place for the Word, your flesh. It is nothing but a mass of corruption. How, then, can the Lord live even in you, when you cannot even live with yourself? How then, shall you *welcome the Lord rightly*?

Yet the Lord *comes not for the well, but the sick*, and was born not into the world because it is beautiful, but *because he so loved it*. Christ knocks not upon the door of your body and flesh and spirit to find rest, for *the Son of Man has no place to lay his head*. He comes to be only what He is; to be the Word, even the Word made flesh; even the Word made flesh within the storm racked wooden hull of your decaying heart. For there, the Word asks only to do one thing; to be spoken, for such is proper of all words.

Therefore, it is written: *'if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.'*

For this alone is the Lord's desire, that He be guarded in your heart, and be confessed by your mouth. And not be confessed before other men, for such do the *Pharisees from the rooftop in many words*. The Word descended from the Father, and seeks only to return to *his father and our father, to his God and our God*. So

by our lips we return Christ the Word to the Father, and our entire being with Him, for again, *he is all, and in all, 'even now,' 'he is near you.'*

It is no odd thing that all the Lord asks is to be spoken, for from the beginning was He spoken into the world, into every creature and every fact; nothing is bereft of His spirit, and so *even the mountains declare his glory*. It is the nature of all things to join in this 'endless song of praise,' to return the Word Christ to His Father, and so complete the journey of the Lord, into time to be with us, and back to eternity, with us. For there, are *mansions prepared for us, and a garden, with the tree of life planted in the midst thereof, to walk in the cool of the evening*.

This alone is salvation, to cling to the Word, to cling to Christ, as He is pronounced in worship, and in awe, and so is raised back to the throne of the Father, there to dwell in glory forever, with us in Him, woven into His being, even His glorified flesh, that the conversation between a Father and His Son may be complete; a conversation that begins and ends as is proper between a parent and child: *'Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'*

'Seek the Lord while he is near' dear Christian,

'For everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Meditation Text: Romans 10:8b-13.