

Meditation for the Fifth Vespers of Lent

'I have not come to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them.'

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What is required of us is simple: *'to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.'* Everyone would agree that such is good.

Who would not love the creator of all, who gave you life, family, friends, possessions, and meaning? It should be easy; who doesn't love a benefactor?

And if we are to love Him who gave us family and friends, how could we not love the family and friends, coworkers and acquaintances as well? Even as we all know we have an inner life, deep in thoughts, so does everyone we meet have an inner life; which is to say, they are just as human as ourselves. They are just as in the image of God as ourselves. They suffer, everyone, even as we do. For we are a people of pain.

Yet we resent our neighbor, our friends, our family, our fellow congregants. We take joy in gossip. We look for opportunity to belittle them. We seek out complaints against this one and that one, that we may insult his reputation, because such complaining brings us perverse pleasure.

We do not know why we like to do this, and yet we all do. Do not think that you are above the judgment. We do it because we hate ourselves, and we know that the only way to hate ourselves less is to hate others more. If they are more wicked than me, than I am not so bad at all.

It is true that there are those we love, even deeply love, but we always keep a couple of people, our neighbors, to abuse, either in public, if we have power, or in private, when we do not. It feels cathartic, a Greek word meaning *purifying*, yet it is far from it. Ultimately, it is corruption.

So we spit on God's image, because it justifies ourselves. And if we feel guilty about so abusing God's image in our neighbor, we spit on God; for if there is no God, there is no God's image, and if there is no God's image, what reason is there to care for our neighbor at all? He is but flesh, mortal and passing.

We will not love our neighbor as ourselves, and to justify this, we will not love God with all our heart, soul, and mind.

We have come to abolish the Law, for its yoke is too heavy for us to carry. Us men, made of malice, who live day to day because we believe there is someone who is less than us. We have cast out the Law of God, because we are too petty to keep it, for, in the end, we think, who would really want to love our neighbor, knowing that he is so flawed? He is a disturbance, best left alone; or perhaps best left mocked, or if we are more civilized, not mocked but spoken ill of in kindly terms.

We hate the Law, and so we are justly condemned by it. Our prison will be hell, and our punishment death.

But the Lord is coming, covered in blood. He bleeds, because we were too petty to see God in this our neighbor. So we tortured Him. Yet He climbs up to Zion.

He is not like us. He has not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfill them. Because He loves God the Father with all His heart, soul, and mind. And He loves us as Himself. Therefore, it is written

'Mercy triumphs over judgment.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: James 2:8-13; Matthew 5:17-20.