

Sermon for the Feast of the Reformation

'From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.'

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In what seems to be a new dark age, these words of Jesus seem as if they could not be more true.

For now more than ever the unbelieving world around us seems to draw up invincible lines of endless armies; a host of celebrities, politicians, thinkers, professors, pundits, polemicists, bloggers, tiktokers; all so aligned in nothing in their life, except aligned in this one thing: they shall not be controlled, controlled by no higher value, no higher cause, much less a cause that goes by the title, *'The kingdom of God.'*

Indeed, our Lord speaks of St. John the Baptist, *who came neither eating nor drinking, yet preaching a word, a simple word: Repent, therefore, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*

A kingdom connotes a king, and a king demands obedience, and this we cannot do: we are enlightened, educated, free, and moreover, we are Americans. *We have never been slaves to anyone.* And so we cannot tolerate even the smallest call to servitude, even if that servitude is to the Divine Majesty Himself, in whom all love, goodness, justice, and might is assumed.

St. John comes preaching this kingdom, this king, and with this king, this submission; and in preaching such submission, he calls on Herod's wife Herodias to submit to what seems a simple command, or not even so much a command; perhaps a simple 'ask.'

'Do not marry your relative.'

That does not seem like much of a demand. But that does not matter. The nature or difficulty or goodness of the demand is immaterial. It is the fact that a demand is made of Herodias at all; it is the mere fact that someone would dare tell her what to do that must be punished, and punished with a bloodied head mutilated upon a silver platter.

We have come a long way from the rebelliousness of Beatniks and Hippies, who at least contended that they rebelled for the sake of a higher ideal, or the Emo Kids and Goths of my youth, who at least claimed to be prophets of their own, awakening their fellow students from their unthinking positivity with their peculiar brand of fatalistic cynicism.

Now, Miley Cyrus needs no reason to ride a wrecking ball naked except that someone may have thought it was the better half of wisdom not to, or Sia reason to swing from the chandelier except that it goes against hotel customer terms of service. The rebellion itself is the reason, the purest instance of what rocket scientists once called 'the self-licking ice-cream cone,' something that has no reason but to give itself reason.

And yet *there is nothing new under the sun*, for though we murder the prophet of the kingdom of heaven, yet every day we dance in the empire of hell. For it is because of pride that we are enslaved to our father the Devil who *fell because of pride*; and the laws of his imperium do not replace service to God with freedom from guilt, but rather slavery to sin against citizenship in the kingdom.

The simple truth is we must behead John the Baptist not because he demands repentance and belief against our revolution and freedom, it is because he offers freedom to we who are willingly enslaved to the Prince of Darkness; and that Prince demands blood, and we happily do his will, for like him, *we are murderers from the beginning*.

You see, *the kingdom of heaven suffers violence* not because the Church is old and stodgy and narrow minded: it is because it is the revolution; it is the rebellion; it is the overthrow of the *liar, and the father of lies*. And we, you see, who swing from the chandeliers, are but his partisans and secret police, and our heart his gulag and his firing squad, where the Word of God is unceremoniously put to death.

Today they kill John the Baptist. Today we kill faith and good works. And every

day from eternity ago to eternity to come, they crucify the Lord, the Lamb ever slain, for the godless *take the kingdom by force*.

Yet the Psalm for today says something frightening, and something strange; for this fright is a comfort, and our comfort is born of fear, for *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*.

*'Come, behold the works of the Lord,
how he has brought desolations on the earth.'*

Every day we are oppressed by the conviction that the age of the Church is over, that the Cross has been defeated. We see the flag of the enemy fly over every institution, and his propaganda play from every radio and broadcast and comment section. His posters celebrating his victory and the new age of his rule hang on every wall, as we endlessly hear of novel new forms of sex, love, and marriage, or the lack thereof; and still more numerous perversions of body and psychology and soul, or the mutilation thereof.

Our faithlessness is proven in this, you who call yourselves baptized, that you believe the propaganda; you do not hear the Word. For the Word speaks of an invasion that is quickly and constantly coming, a victory that is inevitable, and a Lord who comes to lay waste to the demonic imagination of man's heart, and of the fallen angel who makes his throne room therein.

The Lord is coming, Jesus Christ, King. Even now his servant John comes to prepare the way. So what if he is killed? He is but the first of many, one preacher of one word from the Word made flesh, which proceeds from the mouth of God, a word that *makes the kingdoms totter, and the earth melt*.

And as He sent John *to make straight His paths*, so has he sent servant upon servant, through all of history until now, and from now until the end of things. To preach the Gospel, the Kingdom, and repentance that comes through faith, wrought in us by grace, *grace of the only Begotten of the Father*.

We recall, this Reformation Sunday, the little German monk by whom God once overthrew the dominion of the very Antichrist. We celebrate this day, not because there was anything peculiar or special about this little Monk, as German as he may have been, but because he is but one of a chain, endless and unbroken, from the Apostles to St. Athanasius; from St. Augustine to Luther, of those by whom

the Almighty has broken the nations with a rod of iron, and dashed them to pieces like a potter's vessel.

These all bore the only weapon given them, the purity of the Word of God, the message of the love of God poured out upon a wicked and adulterous generation, the news of the one thing needful, *good tidings of great joy*: Behold, the Lord is coming.

Have no fear, for what human invention or devilish innovation has lasted long past its age? We lived in fear of Marxism, but that passed in but seventy years, and the Thousand Year Reich had barely turned twelve years old. The faithlessness of the Enlightenment has been replaced by the thoughtlessness of post-modernism, which is nothing but a pretentious word for idiocy. These all seem like unvanquishable terrors in their time, but in the time next we know them to be nothing but fashions, or moreso, fads, already passé as soon as they become popular.

Yet the priest in his greying clerical, and the old lady praying on her knees before the altar, the man who gives an alm to the poor, and a Bible to the broken-hearted, and the cross of Christ hanging forever above them all, these have outlasted every ideology and invasion and empire. The Church, though always breaking, is never broken, for it is built by God, even as the world is always waking from one human dream to the next, for they are dreamed by men, and found to be nightmares.

So then, dear Christian, in this seeming dark and godless age, [in faith, hold fast to hope.] Look upon these flags of the enemy, flying upon every building, the twisted brainwashing inscribed on his wall hangings and taught in his schools and his churches and sung about on every airway and praised by every respectable TV talent in a suit, who looks upon you, or more accurately, upon the cross invisibly engraved upon your chest in holy water, with a sneer. And smile back, as you gaze upon these things, knowing that the King is coming, and speaking to yourself in sacred derision, the words given to us in a Psalm, the song of Reformation:

*'Come, behold the works of the Lord,
how he has brought desolations on the earth.*

*"Be still, and know that I am God.
I will be exalted among the nations,*

I will be exalted in the earth!”

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Revelation 14:6-7; Romans 3:19-28; Matthew 11:12-19.