

Sermon for the Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

“Far be it from you, O Lord. This shall never happen to you.”

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‘From that time forth....’ What time? The time following Peter’s confession in last Sunday’s Gospel reading. *‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God.’* Peter is affirmed by his Lord for his confession, and strictly told to tell no one.

Peter the disciple has discerned Jesus’ true identity. He has understood that the promised Messiah had finally come; the Lord had remembered the prayers of His people, His chosen, persecuted, scattered, decimated people; prayers lifted up by the hands of the broken and contrite for millennia, generation upon generation; hands raised up by arms weakened in slavery, by shoulders afflicted in oppression.

Now the Anointed one of God has come. The deliverance of the Lord has incarnated in the form of this man Jesus, *‘The Christ, the Son of the Living God.’* The hour of redemption is come.

Peter sees his teacher, by the shores of Caesarea Philippi, and perhaps recalls the words of John the Baptist. *‘The Kingdom of heaven is at hand [...] Now the axe is laid unto the root of the tree, and the tree which beareth bad fruit shall be hewn down [...] The savior comes with his winnowing fork in his hand, to purge the threshing floor [...] and he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.’*

Before Peter stands the God of power. The God *‘who is all and in all.’* Who loves justice, and hates the wicked, the oppressor, the tyrant, who opposes the proud and mighty. This is He who opened the heavens and uncovered the depths, and flooded the earth in vengeance against the wickedness and evil which had arisen.

This is He who scattered the nations and confused the tongues of those at Babel for their arrogance and pride. This is He who repaid the sin of Sodom with fire,

and Gomorrah with annihilation. This is He who heard the cry of his people Israel in bondage to Egypt, and delivered them from that land with burning hail, with plague, and darkness, and death.

This is He who, clothed in a pillar of fire, led His beloved people through the Red Sea, and drowned in the deep their persecutors. This is He who drove the invincible king Nebuchadnezzar in madness to eat grass as the cattle, and answered the arrogance of Job's friends from the mighty whirlwind.

Behold the Almighty, *who brings down the proud, that he might raise up the lowly; who works great and dreadful wonders by His arm, who lays down Laws of Justice by His Word, and who gives as His sole justification for all His works the words: 'I am the LORD.'*

'I am the LORD.' *'The King of Kings.'* The King who comes to establish the Kingdom of God, who battles against the wickedness of men. He is the Almighty, who will judge the nations, a God who comes *'not to bring peace, but a sword.'* A God, strong in battle.

This is the God whom Peter confessed Jesus to be. The God of his ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This Jesus, the God of power shall be king of this new kingdom, and Peter, along with the chosen disciples, shall rule over it alongside Him in glory and in might.

But now we come to our Gospel reading for this Sunday of Pentecost. The Lord speaks of *'how he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and high priests and scribes, and be killed.'*

St. Peter is confounded. For the power of the Christ was already daily being made manifest before the masses; for the Lord addresses demons, and they tremble; He speaks to wind and waves, and they fall silent in reverence before Him. The dead He raises, the sick He makes whole. What mortal power, what scribe, what priest, what soldier could kill this, the Son of the Most High?

'Lord, this shall never be unto thee.'

The Lord replies: *'Get behind me, Satan.'*

'It is necessary that the Son of man be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified.'

What has come of the power of the Messiah? What has come of the power of God? After all the Lord has done in ages past, His felling of empires, His humbling of kings, after all he has done in His earthly ministry, will He, after all this, be vanquished by the conceited hypocrites of this world?

For anyone who has ever seen a depiction of the Passion of the Christ, nothing is more palpable than the powerlessness of this innocent man against the malice of the mass of humanity. His disciples betray Him, gentile soldiers mock and abuse Him. The Jewish mob turns on Him, with jeers and spitting. The priests invent accusations against Him, the Pharisees and supposedly righteous men threaten Imperial Rome with rebellion if Pilate will not crucify Him. All this He suffers *as a lamb unto the slaughter*.

It is no hard question why Jesus' disciples forsake Him and His followers scatter. How can this man be the Son of the Almighty? He has no might. How can this man be the God who delivered Israel with a strong arm? For the Prophet Isaiah spoke of old *'The LORD is a warrior, he will raise the war cry, and he shall vanquish his foes.'*

The Psalmist declares: *'He shall shatter the teeth of the ungodly, [He shall] Break the arm of the wicked.'* Yet it is Christ's arms that are broken and racked against a tree, it is His body that remains cut and shattered. Is this *man of sorrows, stricken, smitten, and afflicted*, to be the promised savior? *'How can this man save us? He cannot even save himself.'*

'Ye fools and ye blind ones.' Our Lord Jesus is indeed a great King, a God of War. And must not any king, leading his army, pass through foreign and unfriendly lands to lay siege to his foe's fortress? Must he not traverse a strange territory if he is to conquer his enemy in his own homeland, where he is strongest?

To enter Jerusalem, where Pharisees and scribes await to revile him; this is but Christ crossing the border of the homeland of His enemy.

To be delivered by the people to be put to death; this is but to ready Himself for the great conflict to come.

To be crucified, to die, and be buried; this is but to meet our ancient enemy, the devil, with all sin and evil, in battle, to lay siege to Satan's own stronghold of Sheol, that He might plunder the fortress of hell.

It is written that upon the cross: *'Jesus let out a great cry.'* Even as the Prophet foretold: *'He will raise the war cry, and he shall vanquish his foes.'*

'What did you come to see, a man dressed in fine raiment?' 'Ye fools and ye blind ones.' Christ did not come dressed in the soft clothing of princes, but in the arms and weapons of war; yet His arms of war are not as ours, swords and shields, rifles or helmets. They are nakedness and human frailty, for it is written: *'My strength is made perfect in weakness.'*

Peter's blindness, which is too often our blindness, was to believe that the Messiah had come to overthrow Rome, to conquer worldly oppressors, and to discard a corrupt religious class. But His *'kingdom is not of this world.'* He has not come to conquer such small, insignificant principalities and powers, but to vanquish the ancient enemy of all creation. He has come to conquer hell, to imprison death, to sack the wickedness which occupies like a foreign army every human heart, that He might not be the prince of this world, but the King of All Creation, forever ruling from the seat of His cross, forever enthroned in the hearts of His faithful.

'Get behind me Satan' This the Lord says to all who would prevent Him from accomplishing His mission for us, to save us from our unconquerable adversaries. *'Get behind me.'* For I must be *'go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things by the elders, and high priests, and scribes and be killed.'*

'I will deliver thee from out of the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem thee out of the hand of the terrible.'

'And be of good cheer.' Fear not all that oppresses you in this life; fear not the devil, for I will strike him down. Fear not death, for I will break its teeth. Fear not sin, for I will forgive you of its guilt, and liberate you from its grasp. Fear not, for:

'I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.' For:

'Vengeance is mine,' sayeth the Lord, 'I will repay.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Jeremiah 15:15-21; Romans 12:9-21; Matthew 16:21-28.