

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

'Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.'

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The Kingdom is coming; the Lord has sent out his servants to prepare the way. You call these men pastors, for you are respectful. The Lord calls them *laborers*, for there is work to do.

'Servant' is a kindly word. In Greek, the word is '*slave*'. Those who preach and teach and baptize in our Lord's churches are slaves. They wear a tight white collar, because it is a symbol of the shackle about their throats, a sign that all which they say must be taken captive to the Word of God.

They wear a stole over their shoulders, which is a symbol of a yoke, for they are but beasts of burden to carry forward the will of God.

They are to '*carry no moneybag*,' for they are to have nothing to do with the honors of this world, or its comforts. Rather, they wear the black of the priest; black representing nothingness, void; black which professes that they have abandoned all the colors and pageantry of secular success; for the glory of a man is in the success which can acquire nice watches, beautiful rings, and Italian suits. Even as the deaconess and nun cover their hair, renouncing the glory of their own beauty; so the priest and pastor wear their clerical, renouncing the glory of their own potential.

They are to '*carry no knapsack*,' for nowhere to them will be made into a home. Even as their Lord, they shall *have no place to lay their head*; they shall wander, they must wander, for all places must hear the Word they now bear on their tongues. They must go wherever the Lord shall come.

They are to *'carry no sandals'* for one does not shod one's feet when walking upon holy ground, and in the coming of Christ, all the Earth shall be sanctified. Therefore, they are to cast off their shoes, for the sacred blood of the cross has made all the world holy.

They are to *'greet no one on the road'*, for to greet someone, one must first know them. But none shall know these whom the Lord sends out, for they no longer belong to themselves. Indeed, they no longer are themselves; they have no name; they are but emissaries of the Lord. They have died to their old life, even as St. Paul teaches, writing: *'the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.'* *'Greet no one'*, for the dead greet no one, and the Lord's servants are dead men.

The Holy One of God declares: *'Behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.'*

They are lambs, for they are defenseless, and lost without the guidance of their Good Shepherd. They are sent to wolves, for the Good Shepherd shall forsake the ninety-nine in seeking the one. The one may be a wolf; and the ninety nine shall seek the wolf, that it may be made a lamb. If they are devoured in the process, let it be so. Such is still an imitation of our Lord, for our Lord has chosen to redeem the violent and vicious by His own flesh and blood.

The pastor must enter the town, enter the home, saying *'peace be upon this house.'* For though he greets not a friend on the way, he shall bring grace to the stranger at his end.

The pastor must eat what is set before him, for having no wealth of his own, his wealth shall be only the charity of those to whom he speaks in love; he shall live by the pity of others, that he may never know arrogance, pride, prosperity, no kingdom of his own making, for he is to *'carry no moneybag, no knapsack.'*

And if the Word which he bears be rejected, he shall *'shake the dust from his feet'* for *'even the dust that clings shall be wiped off against you.'* For the pastor treads upon holy ground, and if he find unholy ground, let him no longer tread upon it, for it, and all things unholy, shall be destroyed in the Lord's coming. They shall be *'brought down to Hades'*.

The Lord's servants must go wherever He Himself is about to go. Do you see the Lord's servants in your midst? Behold, if these servants, shackled and yoked, have arrived, is not the Lord *'about to come'*?

He is coming this day, *as a lamb in the midst of wolves*. You are wolves, for you must eat flesh to live. He is coming this day, *as a lamb in the midst of wolves*. He is a lamb, that His flesh might be eaten to life.

Eat of His body, and drink of His cup, all you who are burdened with the sins of your life, for our Lord has chosen to redeem the violent and vicious by His own flesh and blood.

Listen, eat, and drink. For in these you see a humble thing, and rightly so, for God has taken on humanity and become a humiliation. You hear a word, you see bread, you taste wine, then you *depart in peace*. Verily, I say to you, even as you walk away from this altar, *'Satan has fallen like lightning from heaven.'*

Do not be insulted to be called a wolf, a creature of might and power, even as a priest must not be insulted to be called a lamb, a creature of docility and simplicity. For the Lord who is both Almighty God and crucified man shall reconcile all things in Himself. Behold, he does this even now, for in this congregation, lamb and lion dwell together, and together are fed by Him who is both the Good Shepherd and Sacrificial Lamb; Him who is both the Pillar of Fire and the still, small voice. For the Lord was made man, and born of a Virgin, an infant meek and lowly, that both power and poverty might be united in Himself. This is the Will of God, for it is His desire from all eternity, that:

'The wolf will live with the lamb, and a little child shall lead them.'

'The kingdom of God has come near.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon texts: Isaiah 66:10-14; Galatians 6:1-18; Luke 10:1-20