

Sermon for the Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

'You give them something to eat.'

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'And when it grew late, Jesus' disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place."

This is, indeed a *desolate place*.

I do not mean to be dark. I do not mean to be naysaying. I do not mean to be negative.

But it is easy to forget, especially for us, who are inundated with pleasures, that the world is overflowing with sadness, and that this earth, this life, *is a desolate place*.

[An old song entitled 'The Streets of London' relates how an unnamed someone is dissatisfied with her life. The singer of the song then asks to take her by her hand, and walk her through the streets of London, to show her the manifold miseries that people suffer, in order to make her realize that her loneliness, her sadness, is not so bad. He shows her the maddening homelessness of an old woman, living out of her bags; a destitute war hero, losing his memory, who wears his medals of valor, even though he remembers not from where they came, which is no large concern, because no one else remembers where they came from either.]

A desolate place.

Take yourself away from your pleasures. Remove yourself from your distractions. Many of us think we are happy. In reality, we are merely distracted. So I say again, remove yourself from your distractions.

Imagine that there is no movie theatre up the road; there is no Netflix on the

internet; there is no cable in your house. Imagine that there is no dog to welcome you, that there is no cat to feed. That there is no scintillating beer waiting for you after a long day at work; that there is no fine glass of wine set beside your dinner plate.

Imagine that your future is not guaranteed; that your savings are not enough to retire on; that your benefits cannot be assured, that your health cannot be taken for granted.

There is no white picket fence. There is no manicured lawn.

Imagine that all the bulwarks, all the walls, all the fortresses that we establish against the reality of this life were gone. What then do you see?

'There are wars, and rumors of war.'

And not merely wars, but soldiers; and not just soldiers, but sons; and some of those sons slain. And some of those sons not slain, but sickened by blood. Blood they have seen spilt. Blood they have spilled. And blood they have spilled because they were commanded to, and commanded by a people whom they love, only to be spat on by that same people as they return. As they return, sickened by blood.

And on the streets, do you not see the poor? Do you not see the lost? It is easy to see them and say 'they are poor, because they are irresponsible', 'they are lost, because they are degenerate' addicts, alcoholics, addicts, thieves. *'But verily I say unto you.'* These tares sown among the wheat are not merely destitute because of their mistakes; rather, as our Lord says, *'an enemy has done this.'*

But why do we need to look to foreign wars and local streets? Do you not see tragedy everywhere in your own world? An old friend who has buried himself in vice, and who is lost forever to his weakness. Youthful children, taken too quickly from their life. Aged parents, taken painfully slowly from theirs. Neighbors brought to the hatred of divorce; their children, brought to the hopelessness of the same.

But why need we look to your own world, when you can look into your own life? I dare not say what has transpired there. But if you are like me, if you are like anyone, it, too, is filled with a *darkness that can be touched.*

The world is overflowing with sadness.

'This is a desolate place.'

Many say they can make this desert blossom. Many promise they have the solution, the answer. Politicians, philosophers, academics. But who can make the desert blossom?

Such promises are vain, for though they may be able to deliver a little extra money, a little extra security, a little extra pleasure, a little extra fun, they cannot promise a solution.

In the desert of this waking life, Our Lord promises no solution. He promises no answer. Rather, as the masses follow Him into the desert, the 5,000 we read of today, with nothing to eat, with nothing to sustain their life, He says simply, *'Bring them to me.'*

He promises no answer. He promises only Himself.

I do not want this to be a long sermon, for I do not want you to lose this point.

Jesus does not come to rescue you from poverty, to rescue you from suffering. He may not deliver you from a hateful relationship; He may not deliver you from a hateful life.

None of this did He promise. But He promises Himself. *'Bring them to me.'*

We lowly pastors are but slaves, servants of the will of our Shepherd. And His will, Jesus' will, which He speaks to us, on behalf of you, Christ's beloved people, is simple: *'Bring them to me.'*

So you are here. And your pastor, who carries on the mantle of Apostles', asks Our Master what it is that we should do now. So we hear Christ's voice: *'Give them something to eat.'*

We indeed will give you something to eat, for we have gathered here this day precisely to eat.

This eating brings eternal forgiveness; this eating brings eternal salvation. And yet you may leave here, feeling just as sad, just as oppressed, missing your loved ones, lamenting your life, as you were before you came.

But remember. Jesus did not promise an answer. He promises only Himself.

Himself in your misery, Himself in your lament. Himself, all the days of your life.

'For whoever eats my body and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.'

[And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.]

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Jeremiah 23:1-6; Ephesians 2:11-22; Mark 6:30-44.